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A

PLAIN COMMENTARY

ON

THE FIRST GOSPEL.

BY

AN AGNOSTIC.



WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

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MOFFITT

PREFACE.

IN the present book we—for as writers like kings may speak in the plural it is here used throughout—have taken upon ourselves to add yet another to the already great array of commentaries on the Christian Scriptures. Some special reason for such an addition may well be asked for and we proceed to give it.

All the many commentaries on the Christian Gospels known to us are the work of Christian believers; believers, it is true, of very varying types, but still believers of some type or other. The present work is not. It is the work of a non-believer in Christianity.

The subject therefore is here approached from a standpoint entirely different from that of Christian commentators. The one sole object of the present work is to give to readers a faithful record of the impressions, favorable or unfavorable, which have been left upon us by a long study of this Gospel narrative. Our one purpose in this book has been to write down our plain thoughts, unexaggerated and untuned down, upon each section of this Gospel matter. And it cannot, we think, be without some service even to Christians themselves to read the thoughts and impressions produced in the mind of a non-believer by a detailed study of the Gospel narrative.



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A PLAIN COMMENTARY

ON THE

FIRST GOSPEL.

MATTHEW I.

THE Christian Scriptures assuredly make a strange beginning.

CHAPTER I.

1 *The genealogy of Christ from Abraham to Joseph. 18 He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary when she was espoused to Joseph. 19 The angel satisfieth the misdeeming thoughts of Joseph, and interpreteth the names of Christ.*

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

8 And Asa begat Josa-

To trace the descent of Jesus through a person expressly declared to be not his father is a curious proceeding. To set before us a long list of ostensible ancestors, and then, when we have reached the final name in that list, to be told that Jesus was not his son, feels a highly eccentric procedure. Whatever else this genealogical record may be, it is eminently and decidedly not "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ," as our author, singularly enough, at once proceeds to show us.

On what ground a genealogy of Joseph is thought to possess any interest or any importance we have never been able to discern. The pedigree of Mary might conceivably have a value of its own; but what real bearing of any kind the table here placed before us is supposed to contain is not discoverable.

Seeing then that this is not a pedigree of Jesus himself at all, we shall not dwell upon it. We may just observe that it is a genealogy that would reflect honour neither upon Jesus nor upon anyone else. The catalogue of fore-

phat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;

9 And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

10 And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;

11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

14 And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

15 And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

fathers and mothers here set forth would excite few people's envy. The majority of the names in this list are of such a character that kinship to them would with most men be wished to be kept quiet.

We may also just remark that there is nothing special and peculiar in this ancestry, at any rate in the earlier and in the major part of it. All Jews were children of Abraham; and the habits of David and his son Solomon were such as would lead us to suppose that a great number of Jews enjoyed descent from them. Of course, in this, as in every other table of pedigree, the descent becomes more confined and restricted in the later stages; but it is mere assumption to suppose that this table culminated exclusively in Joseph. Even if it did, the lineage here set forth would in substance be that of very numerous collaterals in the preceding stages. Thus, if we take the

ancestry here given as that of Joseph, and hence, in some way not decipherable, that of Jesus also, there is nothing peculiar about it, and certainly nothing honouring. The proposition that the veins of Joseph, and by some mysterious process of ascription those of Jesus, were filled with royal blood, or with blood that had once been royal in Israel, was one naturally thought desirable to be established by a Christian Jew writing to Jews. How far this proposition was a genuine and just one so far as it concerns Joseph, we have now no means of ascertaining; but inasmuch as Jesus himself was the offspring of the Divine Being and of woman, from any participation in whose production man himself was pointedly and carefully excluded, Joseph and his genealogy seem to ordinary mortals an elaborate superfluity.

There is, too, something very odd in seeing Christians who are so edified with the fact of Jesus being a carpenter's son, and with the patent humble circumstances of everyone and everything around him; who love to dwell upon his fondness for and blessings of the poor and the humble, and his strictures upon and menaces of the rich and worldly great, contending for the human royalty, *via* Joseph, of Jesus' own veins. The royal lineage of Jesus and his

brethren and sisters certainly seems to have been unknown at Nazareth, at Jerusalem, or indeed anywhere, and is never alluded to by friend or enemy.

This genealogy, altogether apart from the rival one found in Luke, has of itself greatly harassed Christian commentators; for, as is well known, it does not correspond with what we find in the Old Testament. And it must be owned at the outset, Reader, that this does not give us a very favourable impression of our author's accuracy; which impression is not improved when we note that in summarizing even his own list he does not state the numbers correctly.

We now come to the real "book of the generation of Jesus." Instead of having a long list of forefathers as professedly alleged in the preceding account, we now find that Jesus had but one, and one only, forefather—Jehovah himself. The connexion of Jesus with our human race comes, and comes solely, on the female side. Those, however, who are disposed to do so, may comfort themselves by reflecting that Jesus at any rate had one human grandfather; so that after all man is not so excluded from his production as might at first sight appear to be the case.

And now, Reader, what are we to say about this strange verse? We think it is far the best to pass it in silence. If it be true there are things best left unsaid, it is also true there are things best left unthought of. There can be no good in any sense of the word in dwelling upon what is here laid before us; a view strongly confirmed to us by everything we have met with upon the subject. For we are at a loss to say whether the pietistic utterances of believers or the hostile animadversions of sceptics form the more unpleasant reading on this matter.

The condition in which Mary was thus "found" rendered her liable by the Mosaic code to be stoned to death. That divine code was, as we know, full of the death penalty; possibly to make up for its appalling laxity in other respects. The growing humanity of men, and the control exercised on this subject by the Roman authorities in Judea, had, however,

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations.

18 ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

rendered the carrying out of many of the divine enactments regarding the infliction of death no longer practicable. There was not the slightest real danger of men's then setting about the stoning of a pregnant maid to death. Hence the praises of the gentleness of Joseph for being "minded to put her away privily" on discovering the disconcerting condition of his betrothed, in which Christian commentators indulge themselves, are very ludicrous. Discretion and privacy were as obviously the best practical methods in these delicate circumstances eighteen centuries ago as they would be still. It certainly seems a pity that when the angel Gabriel came to apprise Mary of the great impending event of Jesus' conception he did not also apprise Joseph, who was at that very time betrothed to her. It would have saved many unpleasantnesses, which would have been far better saved altogether than removed afterwards.

We now encounter the Supernatural, and whenever such is the case our human faculties cease to be any guide to us; cease, indeed, to be of any service whatever so far as ascertainment of truth goes. Any attempt to sift or test the Supernatural by any powers we possess is, on the face of it, a mere inanity. When we enter the domain of the Supernatural all that guides us in the Natural ceases to avail us. We can predicate nothing: cannot lay down a single proposition. We do not know what or whether anything known to us holds good or not. For though some pious philosophers have ventured to assert that even in the region of the Supernatural absolute contradictions cannot co-exist, and that mathematical considerations retain their validity, it is an assumption simply; obviously and naively drawn merely from our own consciousness. All that can be said is that when the Supernatural comes in contact with the human mind, it inevitably affects us in accordance with the laws of the human mind. Hence, in the endless mass of recorded Supernaturalisms we possess, we find the grave and the ridiculous; the pleasing and the odious; the decent and the indecent; the apposite and the absurd.

Though much of the Supernatural we meet with in these Gospels and elsewhere is a defiance of the laws of Nature, the greater part is neither in accordance with nor at variance with those laws as

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

known to us ; but is, or professes to be, something altogether outside, above, or independent of Nature. Hence the angels we occasionally, and the devils we so plentifully meet with in these Gospels lie, like other supernatural items, quite out of reach of proof or disproof.

With regard to the particular instance laid before us in this verse, we cannot help the remark that it is one of the most infelicitous examples of Supernaturalism we can call to mind. The combination of an angel and a dream, considered as a machinery for producing the result thereby brought about, is as awkward a one as we could well be asked to picture. The angel and the dream spoil each other, and offer an incongruity it is vain to grapple with. The angel without the dream would have been admirable ; the dream without the angel passable. But the confused accounts in this and in a subsequent verse give the impression of a *bona-fide* angel's visit, and yet that the visit and the message formed part of the texture of the dream itself.

As this dream is but one of many to be found in the beginning of this Gospel, we cannot help saying that to us it certainly seems that dreams and "such stuff as dreams are made of" are most unworthy vehicles for the supposed communication of grave messages from Heaven. The use of a medium so justly and inherently suspicious as a dream, the very emblem of all that is fantastic, illusory, and baseless, impresses us most unfavourably. Dreams played an extensive part in superstitious ages. They have long since fallen into a well-merited contempt, for anything more inherently ignoble and trumpery cannot be thought of. The use of, and the setting before men the use of, a medium of such a kind in connexion with supposed momentous revelations from Heaven to man are far from reassuring. It is a medium humbling enough to man, but infinitely more so to Heaven itself.

It may be said that it is not for man to call in question the choice of methods in dealing with us that it may please Heaven to make. There are, Reader, certain believers who seem to take a positive pleasure in abasing all the nobler qualities of the human mind before one of the very poorest of its qualities—faith. They appear to think that the more arduous belief is made the more merit there is in acquiring it ; hence they embrace and apparently even enjoy "difficulties" of all kinds. Happily this disposition is not now common. Whether Heaven intended it or not the undoubted

result of Scripture difficulties has been to reduce the amount of Christian belief now existing to the modest dimensions Christians so often and so truly lament.

This very early opportunity was taken to inform Joseph what his wife's child had to be called, though as we see according to the third Gospel, Mary herself had already previously been informed—also by an angel, but not in a dream—what was to be his name. It is with regret we are unable to follow the custom of Christian commentators at this point and make a number of effusive observations upon the name Jesus. What little we have to offer will be very prosaic. The name Jesus was a somewhat common one amongst the Jews, and we are unable to see that it is any more distinctly appropriate to Jesus himself than many other Jewish names would have been, for all names thus given to children are etymologically highly complimentary. Unlike, in this respect, the founders of most of the other great creeds, the personal name of Jesus has not attached itself to his system and his followers; the more robust terms of Christians and Christianity, derived from one of Jesus' many official designations, fulfilling that object. His personal name is, however, specially borne by one section of his followers—the Society of Jesus—who have not made the designation a very pleasant one to the world generally, or a very palatable one even to many of the other followers of Jesus.

“His people.” Who are these? Clearly not his Father's people, “My people Israel.” For though Jesus tells us he was “not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” his mission so regarded was quite a failure, the house of Israel being then, and ever since continuing, lost sheep, if non-acceptance of Jesus mean being lost. And as applied to us Gentiles, the question, Who are “his people,” and how do they become so? is beset with too many theological disputings to be entered upon here. All human beings are, we understand, God's, that is, Jesus's people. But this broad meaning is hardly the one here intended, though there is not wanting a Christian sect who so maintain. According to any of the narrower and more usual interpretations of the phrase, Jesus' people are and have ever been but a small fraction of our race, and according to any of these meanings of “his people” who are saved, it is clear all the rest of us are unsaved, logic and theology being

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

here, at any rate, in agreement. We think mankind generally, so far from grudging this happy minority their good fortune, will sincerely hope it may be abundantly realized. The familiar picture we have so often set before us, of the anguish that will be felt by the lost at the last day on contrasting their own dreadful destiny with the happy fate of the elect, seems to us a misconception, that happy fate being a decidedly redeeming feature, and a solace of the gloomy scene. It is the happy elect who must, or at any rate who ought, to feel a pang on beholding the bulk of their fellow mortals doomed by Jesus to eternal misery.

We now come across a very familiar feature of these Gospels, and more especially of this first one—the quotation of passages from the Old Testament which are stated to be prophecies and predictions of Jesus. We shall have so many opportunities of considering this subject later on that we propose to adjourn our remarks upon it for a time.

The quotation here made by our author, and declared by him to be a prophecy of Jesus, informs us that many centuries before this time, one of the Jewish seers had declared that Jesus should be called by the name Emmanuel, a word our author thoughtfully translates for his readers. What the Prophet meant by “they shall call his name Emmanuel” we are unable to make out, as we come across no trace of the name being borne by or elsewhere applied to Jesus. But we shall find that even the acknowledged double meanings of prophecies are often a very inadequate number to do them complete justice.

There is nothing by which we can form much idea of the interval between Joseph’s dream and the birth of Jesus; but the dream was a success in removing Joseph’s misgivings, so he “took unto him his wife.” The following verse, if not the cause of, at any rate reminds us of one of the oldest and one of the most curious and most conspicuous of the internal dissensions of Christendom—the varying views held concerning Jesus’ mother. In his chief Church the mother of Jesus is regarded as and called the Mother of God, and has rendered to her homage and devotion scarcely less—often said to be greater—than that paid to her son. By the

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Protestant bodies this Mariolatry is declared to be idolatry, and in those bodies Jesus' mother is scarcely even mentioned. Hence we find this last verse to be the subject of angry and not the pleasantest sort of controversy between learned Christian partisans. Far be it from us to meddle in such a matter. The subject as thus variously treated furnishes, however, an excellent example of the delightful science of Scripture exegesis. Were we not so often warned that the apparent meaning of Scripture is not its real meaning, we should inevitably conclude from what our author here says, that after Jesus' birth, the ordinary relations of man and wife subsisted between Joseph and Mary. If such were not his meaning, he has been most unfortunate in expressing himself. However, the perpetual virginity of Jesus' mother is an article of faith with the major part of Christians. The notion that the womb that bare a son to God should afterwards bare ordinary—and, as would seem, very ordinary—mortals is distasteful to most Christians, and is not altogether relished even by many rigorous Protestants though defended by others. And certainly the brothers and sisters of Jesus we read of do not seem to have contracted any grace from the relationship, for, as we shall see, they were not followers of, or even believers in, their divine brother.

It appears to have been thought necessary or desirable that Jesus should be born in wedlock. We have no option, Reader, but to state that to us the proprieties suffer far more than they gain from this arrangement. Jesus was the offspring of the wife but not of the husband—an arrangement by which marriage as an institution is assuredly not much honoured. Nay, fidelity to the one purpose of this work compels us to add that the narrative here before us grievously dishonours marriage in its very essence.

Why man should have been excluded from participation in the formation of the human body which the Christian scheme necessitated the assumption of by Jesus cannot be conjectured: for it is obvious the divine personality might equally well have animated a body produced in the customary manner. The actual body of Jesus was thus composed solely of woman's flesh, which cannot be considered as in any way purer or higher than man's own, and which seems a very partial representation of the human race.

Gladly, Reader, do we leave what we cannot help terming this most unwholesome chapter.

MATTHEW II.

It is, we think, greatly to be regretted that we do not know the precise date of this memorable event. As with

CHAPTER II.

1 *The wise men out of the east are directed to Christ by a star.* 11 *They worship him, and offer their presents.* 14 *Joseph fleeth into Egypt, with Jesus and his mother.* 16 *Herod slayeth the children;* 20 *himself dieth.* 23 *Christ is brought back again into Galilee into Nazareth.*

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men, from the east to Jerusalem.

many another momentous occurrence in the world's history, the exact time of the change from B.C. into A.D. remains unknown. The impression which probably most readers of this Gospel bring with them, that Jesus was born on the 25th December in the year 1 of our era, is unfortunately not only not well founded but quite a mistaken one. Scholars—those patient and laborious, but most prosaic beings, who have demolished so many agreeable illusions—assure us that Jesus was born in the year 4, B.C., thus shedding a most untimely humour over the

occurrence; and thereby also rendering all our dates based upon “the year of our Lord” wrong ones. Even scholars cannot discover in what part of the year Christmas Day occurred. In spite of the asserted non-importance of this knowledge, few people, we think, will be able to help regretting that we cannot fix in our calendar this great red-letter day in the history of our race. The two days now observed in different parts of Christendom in honour of the event are mere guesses, and the immense probability is that we every year pass by the real anniversary unobserved and unhonoured.

We are more fortunate in knowing accurately the place where the auspicious event transpired. Our Creator, in his human capacity, first saw light in the Jewish village of Bethlehem, about six miles from Jerusalem. Though we could not gather the fact from the narrative before us, Jesus was born away from home. This was at Nazareth, a village in Galilee some eighty miles north of Jerusalem, at which place Joseph, notwithstanding his royal ancestry, and Jesus, notwithstanding his celestial lineage, both followed the humble occupation of a carpenter.

After Jesus was born, the first thing recorded is that he received a visit from some Eastern Magi—or, as in more senses than one the word is here translated, wise men. We must own we should have liked these “wise men” better had they come from the West. Eastward of Palestine is the dreary region and home of Phantasm. Westward there were then living some real wise men, whose

names are yet held in great honour. Alas! we shall find that human wisdom is not in favour in heavenly places.

How these Magi made out that the "star" they had seen "in the east" denoted the birth of a King of the Jews is not clear. There are no known human means of deciphering any connexion between the two things. Nor is it clear why they or anyone else should desire to worship a King of the Jews, and make a pilgrimage for that purpose; for, humanly speaking, a King of the Jews was not an imposing potentate. There seems no recourse for solving this matter but the supposition of some supernatural illumination of these Magi.

Unfortunately these Magi travelled six miles out of the true way. Instead of going to Bethlehem where the infant lay, they unhappily went "to Jerusalem" with, as we shall see, the most disastrous results. The "star" seems to have been an intermittent sort of guide, for on their arrival in Jerusalem the Magi had to inquire "Where is he"? and singularly enough they were directed to Bethlehem not by the star but by Herod himself.

Belief in omens, prodigies, and portents, is a heavy affliction and subjects its unhappy victims to endless anxieties and terrors. We see this strongly illustrated in the many scares from comets and other causes which so terrified men throughout the Middle Ages. What a blessed deliverance, Reader, is the deliverance from superstition!

The change of title here made from King of the Jews to Christ arrests the attention very markedly, as there is nothing recorded to lead up to this transition. We may here remark that this makes the fourth title already bestowed upon our Infant—Jesus, Emmanuel, King of the Jews, Christ. Later on we shall encounter a bewildering multiplicity of others. We are not prepossessed, nor much impressed, with this titular array. One single clear designation would have been better than the whole list of metaphorical ambiguities in the shape of name borne by or at any rate attributed to the prophet of Nazareth. Some of these titles, too, as might be expected, look very odd when placed side by side, and do not go very well together. In studying holy writ, however, we soon become used to the incongruous.

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

The curious assembly gathered together by Herod answered his

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa; for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

purpose, and, unhappily, yielded him the information he was in quest of. When we remember the constant and lamentable want of insight into the true meaning of Old Testament prophecies—which meaning is now so clear to Christian commentators—everywhere shown by these chief priests, scribes, and “my people

Israel” generally, it is refreshing to meet with this very striking instance of clear and penetrating vision. This is all the more remarkable as the clue here vouchsafed by the prophet is, it must be admitted, as equivocal as prophetic clues generally were. For it was the judicious practice of the Jewish prophets, as was also the case at Delphi and elsewhere where this art was cultivated, to carefully avoid clearness. Plain speech would not only have spoilt the charm of these utterances, but would also have deprived interpreters of the opportunities of displaying those powers with which we are all now so familiar. Hence it is that prophecies, owing to this extreme care of prophets to guard against definiteness, are often ingenious masterpieces of circumlocution.

“A Governor that shall rule my people Israel” is a phrase not only not obviously distinctive of any given person, but is a remarkably general and promiscuous one. The Governors that from time to time ruled “my people Israel,” were very numerous, and not very remarkable, in the better sense of the word. We do not think any of them were worth having their birthplaces predicted. The Governors, too, that ruled Israel were not, alas, always Israelites even. Gentiles often discharged this duty, did so in Jesus’ own time. And we shall see that instead of ruling Israel or being a Governor himself, Jesus paid tribute and expressly recognized Cæsar’s jurisdiction. We are, of course, all now aware of the “inner” meaning of this phrase; the spiritual kernel enclosed in the husk of mundane phraseology by the prophet has been successfully extracted by theologians. But might these happy theologians not be a little more charitable in judging those Israelites who took the words of the prophet in their natural sense, and could not see how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled them; more especially as this is still the view taken by “my people Israel”? Before we leave this verse, we cannot help expressing our astonishment at the license or carelessness, as anyone may see on reference, with which our

author "quotes" scripture; and here makes this assembly also quote it.

The Magi evidently fell into a mistake in having a private interview with Herod; though it seems that mutual information was thus obtained. It is to be presumed Herod was informed "what time" the star appeared, and it is clear the Magi got an answer to their inquiry "Where is he"? and were directed by Herod to Bethlehem.

It is usual to ascribe to Herod at this point the malicious intention of finding the little King of the Jews, the little Christ, with the object of killing him. This does not seem very clear, as our author ascribes the Bethlehem tragedy to Herod's wrath on finding himself "mocked" by the non-return of the Magi.

The heavenly lantern, whose guidance had, as we have seen, been in abeyance in Jerusalem, now resumed its kindly offices to the Magi, leading them to, and standing over, the place where Jesus was.

It would seem, though we cannot be certain, that these Magi were the only persons who saw this celebrated star. They were the only persons to whom it seems to have been of any service. To our thinking, Reader, it was a sorrowful star, that star of Bethlehem. What good purpose for Jesus or for anyone it served we cannot discover.

It stood over Bethlehem, however, with a dire meaning to the homes there. All the little children there, except the one that "fled" into Africa were soon to be little corpses. The star of Bethlehem has had some little tolerable poetry and a great deal of doggrel addressed to it; also a considerable quantity of religious and sentimental prose. It has, too, had a good deal of banter bestowed upon it, which yields less amusement however, than the laborious effort of some theologians to throw light upon it by semi-natural conjectures as to how it may have been produced. They seem to have been led into these ill-advised attempts to naturalize the Magi's light from its being termed a star; forgetful of the fact that the Jews who did not know what or where the real stars are, but thought them to be little ornaments to

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

our earth, would very naturally give that name to such an appearance.

We do not know if we are right in taking the house here mentioned to be the inn in an outbuilding of which Jesus, according to another Gospel, was born. It hardly looks as though Joseph and his wife would like to remain long at such a place. Their making there at all, would seem to show that they had no friends in Bethlehem.

11 ¶ And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Much fanciful writing has been compiled concerning the presents offered to Jesus by these Magi. Their ideal, symbolical, illustrative character has been long and tediously dwelt upon; their monetary or useful quality being eschewed by all but one or two courageous commentators who, perhaps from the fact that our text justly places the precious metal first, discover therein a providential provision for the needs of the holy family whilst in Egypt: a view which, with all deference to the more ambitious efforts we have mentioned, seems to us far the best that has been suggested.

The idea of making presents to the Creator of the World is not without its humorous aspect. As a matter of fact, the gods have in every age and country been very fond of presents and offerings. They are so still. And though we have now no means of actually getting material offerings to the various heavens they are intended for by various sections of our race, many ingenious methods of utilizing them by their respective representatives here are in operation with, it is understood, full and undiminished propitiatory effect.

It seems a great pity that instead of being warned not to return to Herod the Magi were not warned to keep away from him in the first instance. The notion that a *de facto* King of the Jews, who had a number of sons, should wish to find out

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

and pay homage to a new-born King of the Jews was one that "wise men" should scarcely have needed any warning against. We never hear again, here or elsewhere, of these Magi. One would have thought they would have become missionaries of the New Faith to their own countrymen on their return home; for, according to some commentators, they were the "first fruits" of the Gentiles. We here meet with what we shall find to be

a marked characteristic of this Gospel; namely, that what we should naturally and inevitably expect to follow given events, what we are led up to look for from the very nature [of the occurrence recorded, is often strikingly and conspicuously absent. "Their own country" is not stated. Whether these Magi were Persians, Hindoos, Chinese, or whatever else we shall never know. They here return into that Oriental obscurity from which, when we bear in mind the appalling consequences of their appearance in Bethlehem, we are sorry they ever emerged.

And now, Reader, it may not be out of place if we here stay and ask ourselves the question, What do we think of these Eastern Magi and their star, proffered to us as introductory attestations to a supposed genuine Revelation from Heaven. Well, we can only reply that to us they are very considerably worse, indeed far worse, than none at all. By hypothesis, the Creator of the Universe comes to our planet in the form of a human babe, and his birth is recognized and proclaimed in the above manner! Nor is it altogether the parsimony shown in such small marvels that jars upon us so much. It is the quality, not the quantity, of what little is here set before us that is so repulsing. That the appearance of our Creator upon our little globe should be marked in some becoming way would have been appropriate, and a record of it agreeable. That he should have come in silence, unmarked by wonders of any kind, would also have had a dignity of its own. But marvels of this type repel us; they chill faith, instead of inviting it.

There were, so it seems to us mortals, two ways open to Providence of shielding Jesus from harm. First, by staying the arm of Herod, and thus saving not only the life of Jesus, but also the lives of all his little fellow towns-children; or, as here given, flight on the part of the holy family, and abandonment, *sauve que peut*, for all the other little Bethlehemites. We are grieved to find that Providence chose the latter. And as we read this, we are compelled to say that our heart is not with the fugitives into Egypt, but entirely with the little victims and their parents thus left behind.

This effort of Herod to find and destroy the little King of the Jews, the little Christ, brings before us a very curious and yet very familiar feature of ancient, and especially of Oriental history,

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

namely, a belief in destiny and an attempt to frustrate it. It seems clear Herod believed the prophecy which declared that the new-born King at Bethlehem "shall rule my people Israel," and yet he determined to spoil this piece of destiny by finding and killing the infant. How men could ever harbour such a fatuous idea is not intelligible. Belief in destiny and submission to it are intelligible. So, too, are disbelief in and disregard of it. But belief in it, and an inane attempt to quash it, are not.

To what part of Egypt Joseph took his wife and her child is not stated; nor can we gather how long they had to remain in that country. The advent of Jesus upon earth was a very troubled one. Born in an inn, or rather in a stable, far away from his human home; his life in jeopardy from the jealousy of a petty tyrant; carried by night into a foreign land to escape massacre—the narrative is truly amazing, in more senses, perhaps, than one. But it is not interesting. A record of dangers escaped is always interesting when related of purely human beings; but a record of dangers escaped by a God destined to escape them, to whom there was no real possibility of their actually happening, is an artificial, stilted thing. Such narratives have an air of make-believe about them that robs them of all interest and renders them reading of an extremely insipid kind. Anyone who will read the apocryphal Gospels, as those not received into the Canon are now called, will find a great deal more tiresome matter of this kind, showing the wonders that befell Jesus in Egypt, and the many "narrow escapes" he underwent.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

All religious systems offer us a curious admixture of submission to the natural and professed over-ruling of it. Here we witness a marked example of the former; the King of Kings, the Creator of all things, together with his mother and her husband, patiently await in Egypt until the death of a trumpery little human potentate takes place. We read in Jewish and other histories of persons being removed for much less crimes than Herod committed; aye, in the very volume before us, of which this Gospel forms a part, we read of persons struck dead for relatively venial offences. But we are told it is not for us to sit in judgment on Heaven's doings and non-doings. We agree that there is not much profit in doing so.

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

It is generally thought that our author's narrative was first written in Hebrew, and addressed more especially to his own countrymen. His continued anxiety to show how Old Testament passages were predictions of Jesus, and how Jesus fulfilled them bears out this view. It is to be feared our author's success was not great. Anyone who will read the passage and context here declared to refer to Jesus will, we think, have a good idea how far the argument was likely to satisfy and convince.

The visit of the Magi to Jerusalem proved to be a most calamitous occurrence. Their declaration in Jerusalem that a King of the Jews was just born excited Herod's attention; led to the flight of Jesus and his parents from the country; and, worst of all, led to the dreadful massacre our author now proceeds to narrate. What useful, what conceivable purpose was served by this untoward announcement on the part of the Magi, is not discoverable. Jesus, for at least thirty years afterwards lived in seclusion up in Galilee, his very existence unknown in Jerusalem. And when he went there towards the end of his life, we shall look in vain for the slightest reference either by himself or by anyone else to what we here read. Anything more utterly purposeless than this visit to Jerusalem of the Magi and its pitiable consequences it would be difficult to imagine.

It is probable the wise men had given Herod a promise to return with the desired information; hence he considered himself—and so our author apparently thought also—mocked.

The account of this massacre here given contains some singular features. The phrase "all the children" probably means all the male children only: though discrimination of sex would cause both trouble and delay in such a business. The butchery included Bethlehem and "its coasts," whatever that may mean. The most singular point, however, is that the slaughter was extended up to children of two years old—little things who could move about and talk; and the reason assigned is "according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men." Either Herod must have misunderstood the Magi, or they misled Herod. But what an egregious business the whole feels to be every way! Were we told that Herod overtook these mischievous Magi and slaughtered them also, we think few readers would feel very much more grieved.

16 ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

The first Christmas was not a festive one in Bethlehem. There was "lamentation and weeping and great mourning" there. Poor Bethlehem ! The journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth for the special purpose that Jesus might be born in Bethlehem may have been an honour, but it was dearly bought. The coasts of Bethlehem have, too, since then been freely soaked with human blood owing to the great but vain efforts of Christendom to wrest them from the degradation of possession by the followers of another great Prophet.

It appears that this terrible massacre was no mere accident, or untoward incident. Centuries before Herod,

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

the Magi, and the children of Bethlehem were born, this event had been foreseen, and written down in the book of Fate. We are sorry to learn this. We are unable to gather any consolation or satisfaction from the fact that Jeremy predicted this event. Nay, we own that to us it constitutes a heavy aggravation

implying as it does that this fearful slaughter was one of those things that had to be ; was foreseen but not provided against.

It is a pleasure, however, to know that we have good grounds for not agreeing with our author on this point. A reference to Jeremy himself has satisfied us—presuming we possess all the productions of that Seer—that there is no ground whatever for the imputation here made. Prophets, it is true, speak in whispers only, which it requires almost another prophet to understand. But even prophets are not always unintelligible, and we are satisfied that the meaning here ascribed to Jeremy in this passage by our author is entirely groundless.

With the amiable view, we suppose, of softening our pain at the narrative of this massacre, and its permission in such a connection, some commentators have ventured to offer us some considerations, intended, we gather, to be soothing to our hearts if not to our minds. These little victims were in reality favoured beings, we are told ; they are now termed "the holy innocents," though why more holy or more innocent than any other children dying young is not stated ; they were by this means saved from the ills and trials of life ; and they are now safely lodged in Heaven. Some doubt, however, seems to exist as to whether they continue babes in that happy land or no. We do not know what warrant there is for such assertions, nor do

we know whether these commentators would like their own children to be favoured in a like way. From such a point of view it almost seems a matter of regret that the radius of the slaughter was not greatly extended. We know nothing in the world more truly sad than the wild arguments used by pious men in struggling with the ugly parts of their holy writ. For ourselves, we find a much more solid comfort as we think of this melancholy story. It is that it rests upon the sole unsupported statement of our author. Of corroboration there is not a vestige. Learned Christian scholars have toiled zealously, not, as one might have hoped, to dispel this story, but we regret to say, to substantiate it. We are thankful to add without any success whatever.

Having remained in Africa until the death of Herod took place,

19 ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

Joseph is apprised in the customary manner of a dream that that event had now occurred, and is commanded to return with Jesus and his mother into the land of Israel. We have never been able to learn from Christian teaching how Jesus ought to be regarded and thought of during the time of his infancy. Was he then what we understand by the word child, with childish

faculties and capacities only, passive and dormant as any other infant? This view leaves us in the awkward position of having to think of Jesus in the greater sense of second person of the Trinity as being in a sense not present in the infant. We have indeed no wish and no intention to venture into the quicksands of theology; but in perusing a narrative compounded of the natural and the supernatural, we are often compelled to frame to our minds some notion of the relations and interaction of the two, in order to comprehend even the purely natural portion alone. Our author's expressions would certainly lead us to the conclusion that there was complete passivity on the part of the divine infant; warnings from God would not have been needed with God present in any real and active sense.

On arrival in the land of Israel an unexpected obstacle presented

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

itself to Joseph, for he learnt that Archelaus, who was not a very great improvement upon his father Herod, reigned in Judea. It appears from this that it was Joseph's intention to go

and settle in Judea, presumably at Bethlehem. But that place

would surely have been a most painful one to Joseph and to Mary. The great mourning and lamentation prevailing there caused, as they would have found, by the slaughter made and intended for their own little one, would have rendered the place unendurable.

The difficulty which here met Joseph was overcome in the usual way: he was warned in a dream to turn aside and make for Galilee. This is the fifth dream in our author's narrative. Four of these were Joseph's; the other—which we have counted as one, though whether it was a single or multiple one is not clear—that of the Magi. Of these five dreams three are given as by the instrumentality of an angel's appearance in the dreams; the other two are given as simply warnings from God "in a dream." This difference naturally draws our attention, but whether it represents any difference of process it would be profitless now to conjecture. The extent to which the personal element is at work in these Gospels, and the way in which the writers' idiosyncrasies come out, so noticeable in many other respects, are forcibly shown here. Dreams are absent in the other gospels, the visits of angels being given in the third as direct, without the unnecessary and disagreeable medium of a dream. Such was our author's fondness for, and such his estimation of dreams, that as we shall see, he brings in even at the trial of Jesus, a woman's dream; though it is only fair to note that he does not ascribe it either to God, or even to an angel.

Herod's death having been waited for only to find him succeeded in Judea by a son of a like kind, into whose power it was equally unsafe to venture, Joseph's steps were thus diverted into Galilee, where another, though apparently a not less dangerous, son of Herod—for it was the one who beheaded the Baptist—held sway. To a "city called Nazareth." Who would have imagined from all this that Joseph and his wife were simply returning home; that very home in Nazareth from which they had set out to come to Bethlehem on account of a Roman census? Who, above all, would have imagined that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had been in Jerusalem; and that the child had actually been publicly presented in the temple, and recognized by notabilities of the city as the Messiah—all this under the very nose of Herod? Such,

however, to our astonishment we find to have been the case, according to another Gospel.

The two pronouns "he" have been very happily discriminated, and preserved from confusion for readers of this translation by the use of a capital letter in the latter case; for as it stands the sentence is very mixed. We are sorry to say we hear no more of the worthy carpenter in this history.

26 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

In compiling his Gospel, Matthew, as we shall see throughout, was on the look-out for prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament. It must be admitted that anything precise or definite was not to be found, such indeed being contrary to the nature of all "prophecy." Even now, we must sorrowfully own that forecasts of Jesus of Nazareth in the Jewish Scriptures, are only visible through a strong theological microscope, looked at with the eye of faith. Our author has not hitherto been either skilful or happy in his quotations, nor yet, we grieve to say, accurate. Here, however, his zeal to find and set forth predictions of Jesus humorously overshoots the mark, and leads him into a blunder that has afforded much diversion to sceptics and put Christian expositors to much inconvenience. For "He shall be called a Nazarene" is, alas, nowhere to be found. The performances of Christian commentators upon the word "Nazarene" are a study; a study, Reader, of a very mournful and unwholesome kind. In our judgment the interpretation of prophecy in the hands of theologians forms about the most morbid and most melancholy study a healthy mind can approach. The theories and practices of "double-meaning," "inner meaning," or "deeper meaning": of accommodation, projection and spiritualization, inevitably and deservedly poison the mental and moral atmosphere. The most painful feature of all this is that "explanations" of this "Nazarene" and other "quotations" are often tendered, that no amount of charity will enable us to believe have really passed muster with the intellects that proffer them. Without ascribing to the authors and users of such "solutions" the consciousness of an attempt to delude, it is often palpable and transparent that these solutions have not succeeded with their authors and users, however they may fare with readers. Of the endless solutions of the immediate difficulty before us, we have only a remark to make on the common but desperate one that Matthew quotes from a lost prophecy. This raises the appalling thought

that some portion of Divine Scripture is lost ; is in our possession no longer ; a notion to us unendurable. The idea of a mistake on the part of Matthew is surely but a trifle in comparison.

Such, Reader, is the strange introduction to this Gospel history. It begins by setting before us a long genealogy at first alleged to be that of Jesus, but which proves to be simply that of his mother's husband ; a genealogy taken from, but not corresponding with the Jewish Scriptures. It then proceeds to show that Jesus in reality was the offspring of the Divine being and a human female—a tediously commonplace feature of religious systems.

The birth of this semi-divine and semi-human infant was signalized by the appearance of a "star" to a number of Eastern Magi. By this star these Magi were led to Bethlehem, or rather to Jerusalem. The appearance of these Magi in the latter city troubled and alarmed Herod and "all Jerusalem" and led Herod, with the view of destroying the newly born "King of the Jews," to perpetrate an appalling massacre of all the children in Bethlehem and its coasts. This terrible and tragic event is known to our author alone, having unaccountably escaped the attention of all other historians.

From this fearful massacre the semi-divine infant escaped by the flight of his "father" and his mother with himself into Egypt. Herod succeeded in slaughtering all the other children of Bethlehem and district but just missed the one he sought for. The very clever and masterly way in which Herod was foiled seems to excite much admiration in some pious minds.

Jesus and his "parents" remained in Egypt until Nature or Heaven—apparently the former—terminated Herod's life ; after which they returned to Nazareth, though Herod had there and elsewhere been succeeded by sons not any better than himself.

This strange proem to the Gospel history is embellished with five dreams and with many "quotations," if such they may honestly be termed, from the Jewish Scriptures, beginning with a very freely extracted genealogical table and ending with a specific quotation from the prophets which, unhappily, cannot anywhere be found therein.

Such is the prologue to this Gospel narrative. We do not like it, Reader.

MATTHEW III.

A GREAT gap here occurs in the Gospel history. Without a single reference of any kind whatsoever, our author makes a bound of thirty years in his narrative. If he knew nothing of the events of that long period, or deemed nothing he knew worth recording, we cannot complain. But it is none the less a sudden and somewhat violent transposition. A chasm of this kind in a grave historical record, and more especially in a biography, is not pleasant.

CHAPTER III.

1 *John preacheth: his office: life, and baptism. 7 He reprehendeth the Pharisees, 13 and baptizeth Christ in Jordan.*

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa.

To be abruptly transported from Jesus a babe in his mother's arms to Jesus in the prime of life is very disappointing; for it is to be carried over the most interesting period of his or of any life. The reason or motive for this immense hiatus does not appear. It certainly looks singular that a writer who knew so much about the infancy of Jesus, even to such minute matters as Joseph's dreams, should know absolutely nothing of Jesus during the following thirty years.

The last of those three decades especially raises our curiosity. From twenty to thirty is the most active and vigorous section of any life, and even a short outline of how spent in the case of Jesus, could not have failed to throw much light upon his life and character.

But perhaps this great blank, this bound from infancy to complete manhood, is not unintentional. For religious purposes it is probably better than information, which has an invariably sobering effect upon everything. Any attempts that may be made to picture our Creator passing through the stages of boyhood, youth, and early manhood are eminently unsatisfactory. Many things are far best shrouded.

The truth of this is well shown by the great fact which we can never forget, and can never over-rate—the great fact that the people to whom all these things here omitted concerning Jesus were well known, those brethren, sisters, and fellow-villagers who had known Jesus intimately during all those years of boyhood, youth, and young manhood, did not believe in him, and declined to espouse his cause. How he shared the fate of other prophets in being without honour in his own country, in his own house, and among his own

kin—that is, by all those who knew him best—Jesus later on very frankly confesses. Knowledge, Reader, is a terrible iconoclast.

The selection of our little planet from amongst the myriads of similar and greater cosmical specks with which space is filled for a visit from the Creator in person, fills us moderns with unavoidable astonishment; a feeling from which the people of those days, who thought our earth the chief factor of the universe and the rest of the starry host puny subordinates to it, were free. There is, however, no use in letting our minds dwell upon the crowd of vain speculations the hypothesis gives rise to.

Looking at the matter in its nearer and practical aspect, we find that for thirty years the Creator of the Universe quietly and unostentatiously lived upon our little globe. What a happy generation of men that surely was had the glorious fact but been known. Unhappily it was not known; hence we find that things went on during that period in their usual everyday way. One would have thought that such a Presence on earth would have made even Nature herself beam in honour. Some kind of sympathy in men and Nature with that great visit feels to be demanded. But we look in vain for any. As a matter of fact, those thirty years form a humdrum, nay, very unattractive, chapter of history. The personal presence of God effected no happy change in earthly affairs as might have been expected. The full average quantity of follies and misdeeds were effected in that period. Nor does mother Earth appear to have in any way recognized her Maker. We read of famines, storms, pestilences, and poor harvests just as usual.

Theologians often and justly assure us that human modes of looking at things are not the Divine modes. This is only too clear. And we are told that one of the most striking illustrations of this is seen in the amazing slowness, not to say tediousness, with which the Divine purposes become unfolded. Not in instantaneous results, but in far-off workings-out are we to look for a divine hand. In all this we regret to be obliged to concur. The exceedingly leisurely way in which Heaven often proceeds is strikingly shown in the fact that the thousand years that followed God's visit to us is the most dismal period in all our history. Not indeed until these latter centuries have the rich fruits said to be due to the Divine visit and to the Divine message then delivered to us, become so discernible; the happy coincidence of so many human discoveries and improvements in these later ages having, it would appear, served to reveal

the long latent blessings now ascribed by believers to that message.

This verse gives us a good idea of the historical style and spirit in which this Gospel was written. After making a lapse in his narrative such as we have seen—the great extent of which, though obvious enough, is only approximately known to us from other sources—the writer quietly recommences his history with the words, “In those days.” With these enlightening words he proceeds to bring before us a notable figure in the Gospel history—John the Baptist; a figure shrouded, however, with even more than the usual obscurity which characterizes the Gospel accounts of men and things. Our knowledge of John may be stated in a very moderate-sized paragraph. He was a blood relation of Jesus, their mothers being cousins. He possessed the distinction enjoyed, if we may use the word, by some other noted Jews, of being the offspring of an aged woman. He was “in the deserts” until he made his public appearance as a baptist. He was an ascetic of a rigid, and we see from his garb and diet, a fantastic type. He was more popular with his countrymen than Jesus; for we are told that all men held him as a prophet. His baptism, if we take the phrases here descriptive of it in any approach to their normal meaning, was on an extensive scale. His real attitude to Jesus forms one of the most puzzling of Gospel enigmas. He did not join Jesus personally, nor outwardly coalesce, but retained his own disciples, some of whom we shall meet with later on in a very curious manner. He was imprisoned either more than once, or if once only, for an apparently considerable time. At last, having given offence to the wife or would-be wife of Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, that woman by means of her daughter’s dancing, got the petty ruler to make a vow to give her daughter what she wished; whereupon, instigated by her mother, she asked for the head of John, which was accordingly cut off and given to the girl, and by her given to her mother.

Such is all the information we possess of John the Baptist. It is a strange and sad record. But then we must again bear in mind that the ways of Heaven are not altogether like man’s ways; a fact of which not seldom we need not be ashamed, of which indeed we have often great and just reason to be proud as we study the contents of Divine Scripture. For the permissions, the omissions, and the commissions there set before us as divine are often as distressing as they are unintelligible.

In what sense John prepared the way for Jesus it is not easy to

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

gather; in what sense he made Jesus' paths straight is not very discernible. John's life may possibly have been of service to Jesus, but it does not appear in what way it was so. The passage of Esaias here quoted, and for the application of which to John we have John's own authority given to us in the fourth Gospel,

speaks of valleys exalted and hills made low, crooked places straight and rough places plain. But this was a state of things anything but applicable to the life of Jesus. He himself was continually complaining of the faithless and perverse generation he had come amongst, the baptism of which by John seems to have had little useful result. Indeed, not the straight but the rough paths trod by Jesus have ever been a favourite subject with pietists of the sentimental order.

John must have presented a highly curious spectacle attired as

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

here set forth. No reason is assigned for this queer garb. Some think it was in imitation of that worn by the prophet Elijah. Many attempts have been made to symbolize doctrines by dress; but camel's hair and

leather girdles do not seem promising materials to extract any very valuable "inner meanings" from. John's diet was not less peculiar than his dress. Plain fare—simple bread and water or fruit and water—has supported many an enthusiast both before and since the time of John; but locusts and wild honey certainly seem a very sickly diet, if, as appears to be implied, they formed John's sole food.

And here let us say how pleasing it is to find throughout all these Gospels that, as regards Jesus himself, not a single petty peculiarity of this kind either in dress, food, or personal habit is recorded. Many incidents in his career show how superior he was to many narrow unsocial notions then prevalent. Even on the much debated matter of wine he both took it and on one occasion even made it; in this respect differing from the great prophet who came six centuries later and whose prohibition of wine has banished it from a considerable section of our race; differing, too, from many earnest men amongst his own followers who think it ought to be banished everywhere. Indeed, Jesus expressly states

that he came eating and drinking; and he laid down the general proposition, that what goes in at the mouth defiles not a man. On these points Jesus was an agreeable contrast both to his harbinger, and to some sections of his own followers since.

In this verse we encounter a hyperbole that may, it seems to us, serve the useful purpose of a beacon, warning us to be careful in what sense we take many phrases and expressions we afterwards come across. Love of accuracy, and love of exactitude are modern qualities, the fruit of the scientific spirit; and they are qualities whose supreme value and importance in truth-seeking we now so well know. Hyperboles and figures of speech are the bane of all Eastern writings; and figurative expressions are, in these very Gospels, the dismay of all who approach them, not with some pre-conceived theory, often founded on such expressions, but with the hope of trying to find their strict and valid meaning.

Hence we here see the difficulty of estimating the real scale and extent of John's baptism. Those who now magnify its scope obviously do so at the cost of its efficacy, for where are the results to be found? Those who confine it within small compass, reduce the preparation spoken of by the prophet to very humble dimensions. One thing is certain; we look in vain for any of those traceable consequences we should expect from what is here described. Undergoing baptism by John appears to have had no great effect, indeed no perceptible effect, either upon the Pharisees and Sadducees or upon the multitude who experienced it. We do not find them as altered characters in any subsequent events. "Jerusalem and all Judea" may have been baptized by John and confessed their sins; but the after effects are invisible; for all practical purposes Jerusalem and all Judea might as well have remained unbaptized.

Baptism. Our comment on this well-worn subject will be a short one, though it must be owned that it is a ceremony that figures largely in Christian annals. It was no new process. The Jews had long used it for certain purposes, along with many other varieties of ablution; and the practice may be discovered in other nations also. It is a very obvious and somewhat childish symbol; cleansing the body as an emblem of cleansing the heart is not a

⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.

⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

very profound notion. The surface nature of the act is very patent; but then it is the fate, and the well-deserved penalty, of every piece of symbolism to have an absurd aspect, as well as a supposed pertinent one. It is to be deplored that this small rite should have given rise to such great contentions, for it has caused a well-marked rift of its own in the household of Christian faith.

Confession of sins followed by baptism would, it is to be presumed, secure forgiveness; but we shall soon find Jerusalem and Judea with a heavy load of fresh ones, mourned and severely condemned by Jesus.

It is very singular to reflect that "my people Israel" were split up into jarring sects to a probably greater

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

extent than any other people of that time. The sole possession of the divine code and divine truth, which as we know had not been vouchsafed to any other nation, instead of leading them into one clear path of light as we should

have thought, had, alas, not prevented the sharpest differences even on the most fundamental points. But then, stranger still, has not that unhappily been the destiny of a yet brighter light, those Christian Scriptures we are now pondering? Upon them, too, have been and are founded sects the most diverse, inharmonious, and even hostile. From all which we own we see no escape, Reader, from the melancholy deduction that the meaning of divine scripture is not clear; and from the further depressing conclusion that there are no means known to us of ever making it so. Perhaps we may derive comfort from reflecting that even in the case of the great creed founded six centuries after Jesus founded his, and which enjoys the singular advantage of having but one book penned by the founder himself, discords, though not as great as those in Christendom, also exist; and that schools not very friendly to each other also find a place in the faithful fold of Islam.

It is the usual practice of commentators to take the opportunity here offered to give a description of these and other Jewish sects for the benefit of readers; and it is a pleasure to note the juster tone of such descriptions in modern works when compared with the flagrant accounts found in older ones. We shall defer our own impressions of these sects until we meet with them later on. All we have here to note is that one memorable Jewish sect—the

Essenes—is here, as throughout the Gospels, ignored and unmentioned; but very conspicuous by its absence. The cause of this absence is not far to seek: he who runs may read. Christianity's obligations to and unacknowledged borrowings from the Essenes rendered that name a not agreeable one to Christian ears.

The elegant salutation here used by John seems a singular and not a very encouraging way of accosting men coming to confess their sins and to be cleansed by baptism. Their answer to John's question, *Who hath warned you?* is unfortunately not recorded—a characteristic feature of this Gospel which we shall have occasion over and over again to deplore.

This is much the best idea John lays before us. Confession, baptism, and repentance are good in their way, but to bring forth fruits meet for repentance is a great deal better still.

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

John here administered to his countrymen a warning not to trust too much to the fact that they had Abraham to their father. The honour of being the children of Abraham was considered by the Jews to be extremely great. The Jews, however, were by no means the only descendants of that ancient worthy. As a matter of fact

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Abraham's children were both numerous and varied, owing to certain bad habits of his; habits common to all the Jewish "men of God," of keeping concubines and wandering among wives' maids. Great distinction, however, was usually made between lawful issue and the issue of these amours. In the case of Abraham, however, his lawful issue was not confined to the descendants of Sarah even, for he had numerous progeny by another wife Keturah. And in the illegitimate line the progeny of Abraham has given birth to a religion and religious result scarcely less remarkable than that which has accrued from the posterity of Sarah. The child yielded by Hagar to the Father of the Faithful produced in course of time that Prophet of Mecca whose adherents often caused the adherents of the descendant of Sarah to tremble and stand at bay; and whose followers are now considered to equal in number the followers of the Prophet of Nazareth. If the knowledge of, and interest in, earthly affairs are permitted to enter the celestial land, Abraham must have had some strange twinges and sensations as he looked down upon those terrible battlefields

where the followers of the two Prophets, both the issue of his own loins, so often met to slaughter each other. Moralists will, we think, search in vain for a more signal illustration of the consequences of a misdeed, than that afforded by Abraham's unfaithfulness to the marriage tie. John re-enforces the warning here given by the not quite felicitous declaration that God could make Jews even out of stones. There is no reason to think this was ever done; nor is it desirable to hope it ever may be. The children of Abraham of all kinds, with all deference to their good points, form quite as large a proportion of our race as it is on the whole desirable they should.

It may be here remarked that the Jews were always a very race-proud people, with, to our thinking, much less justification than was possessed by some other peoples who strongly nourished that quality. No doubt it is a feeling that may be found in every people more or less. It is found even in a branch of the human family which is usually considered the humblest type of all—the Bosjesmen—for their own name for themselves signifies, we are told, Men of Men. The division of mankind made by the Jews into Jews and Gentiles, though not so harsh apparently as that of the Greeks into Greeks and Barbarians, was in reality much more invidious, and partook very largely of the nature of the Caste notions found further East. Jesus on one occasion applied to non-Jews a definition that left even these latter far behind. Philosophers have differed widely in their estimate of the merit and value of patriotism. That in its better forms it is a good feeling and has served a useful purpose in the world all admit; but it is eminently one of those virtues that easily slides into a vice; and from this cause it has wrought a great deal of mischief to humanity. It is a sentiment that still yields this double fruit; there are, indeed, many good thinkers of cosmopolitan leanings who hold that it now yields our race a great preponderance of evil. Whether this view be true of the patriotic feeling in its better shapes or not, it is unquestionably true of it in some of its other forms; for in these latter it is at the bottom of those wars, and huge preparations for war, which in their sum total of effect are the heaviest burden humanity now endures.

John now makes use of a figure of speech that does not leave any very clear practical meaning behind it. He

10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bring-

declares that the axe is now laid to the "root of the trees," those not bringing forth good

eth not forth good fruit
is hewn down and cast
into the fire.

fruit being felled and burnt; and in the next verse but one, speaking of his successor, he uses another simile—that of wheat and chaff—in which, unlike his other illustration, different parts of the same vegetable product are separated to opposite fates, the wheat gathered into a garner, and the chaff burnt up. These two very commonplace examples afford a good illustration of those drawbacks inherent in all metaphorical methods of teaching, which have justly and deservedly banished the practice from modern usage and even modern toleration. Such figures of speech, instead of simplifying, confuse and mystify what they purport to convey. In the case before us it might be pointed out that men do not burn the wood even of unfruitful trees, having generally very much better uses for it; whilst with regard to chaff—the word so translated really including straw—we all know that that article is scarcely less useful than the wheat itself. But putting aside considerations of this kind, what are we to practically understand by the sorting and cutting down of trees, the threshing and separating of wheat and chaff here laid down? In what sense was this winnowing process carried out? Does it apply to this world, or to the next? The latter seems the only tenable view. For Jesus himself, as we shall find, expressly forbid weeding and commanded to let wheat and tares grow together until the harvest. And such—so far as it is possible to try to decipher any moral government of our planet—is the course then and always adopted. The only meaning ascribable to John's announcement is that of a transcendental reference to the harvest of death and the spiritual assortment following it. In our time there is no visible assortment of men. The followers of Jesus, of all the varied kinds, are indiscriminately mixed among other men, and however internally they may differ from the vast bulk of the lost ones, they are externally indistinguishable. And certainly the unfruitful trees and the chaff are not dealt with as here asserted by John. Religious belief has no effect upon longevity. The axe and the fire are here quite dormant; their coming into play is clearly deferred until we are sorted at death.

John now informs the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the multitude that his own mission is merely introductory; that there is one following, compared with whom, he himself is as nothing. Did John clearly point out to these people that this

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy

to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:

12 Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

ordinate of Jesus. But it must be owned that John's description of that successor—why not name him?—applies to Jesus in but a very abstruse manner. If we have here the full allusion to Jesus which was made by John, we must admit that the clue to identification thus given to listeners was but a slender one. Baptism with the Holy Ghost, and baptism with fire are, we think, best left as we find them, unattempted at explanation. It may be just observed that we read of men and of women being "filled with the Holy Ghost" before Jesus was born; and on the other hand that the Comforter was not sent until after Jesus left the world. Baptism with fire offers too great a choice of meanings, to make a study of the phrase profitable; it is a harsh metaphor which spiritualizing only improves to a very moderate degree.

In the third Gospel some few further remarks of John are recorded. They consist, however, of nothing more original than an injunction to a man who had two coats to impart to him that was without; an exhortation to publicans to exact no more than was appointed; and a command to soldiers to "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages."

We now, after a lapse of thirty years, come to Jesus himself again. We left him a babe at Nazareth, just brought back from Egypt, to which the unhappy affair of the Magi had caused him to be carried. Here we meet with him, humanly speaking, a man in the prime of life; childhood, boyhood, and youth passed and early manhood toning down into mid-life. It is customary to regard thirty as the age at which Jesus commenced his public life. It thus appears that after reaching full manhood he allowed some years to pass before commencing his mission. The quiescence of the last few of those years seems, perhaps, remarkable. This postponement of the illumination and salvation of our species hardly counts, however, when we call to mind the vast ages it had already been deferred.

13 ¶ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of him.

This verse, Reader, really introduces to us the greatest figure in all history, whether we regard him as man only, or as more than man; and whether we regard him as inherently the world's greatest, or as rendered, like other religious founders, great by after events only or mainly. For we are amongst those who think that the greatest figures in history, those who have influenced the course of the world's events most, have not necessarily or by any means been its best and its wisest. All men will, we think, lean to the best estimate possible of all those who have greatly swayed the destinies of our race, even of those great false prophets who have swayed them so lamentably and so lastingly. But whilst this kindly feeling rightly leads us to construe all favourably that can be so done, one great duty should never be forgotten; we ought never to try to admire what is not truly admirable, nor try to believe that to be or to have been good which we cannot honestly think so. All the religious founders have received and still receive a vast amount of sincere but a still vaster amount of nominal and insincere human homage. To record our plain and honest thoughts regarding the Prophet of Nazareth as portrayed to us in this Gospel is the purpose of this work, Reader; a purpose from which so far as in us lies nothing shall make us swerve in one way or another.

We have already remarked that the relation and real attitude of John to Jesus are very puzzling, even as set forth in these Gospels. Whether during the thirty years of their youth and early manhood they were much together, or ever met at all seems uncertain. The statement ascribed to John himself in the fourth Gospel that he knew not Jesus until apprised by the event recorded in the last two verses of this chapter would lead us to believe that until the time we are now dealing with they were strangers to each other, did we not recollect that the habitually mystic meanings of that document render the intended signification of the term "knew" uncertain. Their homes, if that term is applicable to John, were some sixty miles apart; a distance traversed, however, by Mary herself when she visited and stayed three months with Elizabeth; and it certainly seems strained to suppose that the two kinsmen here met for the first time. However this may be, the present is the only occasion on which they are recorded as being together.

It can hardly surprise us that John should hesitate about per-

forming his rite in this case. The thought of baptizing our Creator is enough to startle anyone. Jesus, however, had come up from Galilee for the very purpose of being baptized, and John gave way and performed the ceremony. The submission to baptism on the part of the Second Person of the Trinity, still remains a subject of veiled astonishment to theologians. John's own description of his rite, as the baptism of water unto repentance, is clearly not to be thought of as applied to Jesus; but then every other aspect of the ceremony is equally incongruous as applied to him.

We now come to the first recorded utterance of Jesus; though a few words spoken when a boy given in another Gospel are strictly entitled to the place of honour in point of time. He appeals to John to overcome his hesitation and suffer the ceremony to be performed, assigning as the reason and justification thereof that it becometh "us" to fulfil "all righteousness." In pursuance, we presume, of the same course Jesus had already allowed himself to be circumcized; and had allowed the Levitical offering of a pair of young pigeons to be complied with. To us, indeed, the connexion between righteousness and such ceremonies is no longer discernible. But it is clear that at the outset of his career Jesus was disposed to comply with existing Jewish customs; a line of action noticeable in other religious founders. This fact, and other reasons we shall meet with later on, render the life of Jesus, as a personal example, only now followable by believers subject to many exceptions.

We must own we can frame no conception of baptism, as here practised, that is not more or less distinctly unpleasant. Whether the baptism of Jesus by John was performed apart, or in presence of a multitude has been discussed, but cannot, of course, be determined. Putting aside the case of Jesus for the moment, it certainly feels to

14 But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

us that the baptism of the multitude must have been a curious, and an extremely inconvenient proceeding. Whether performed naked or slightly clothed the process would be tantamount to that of bathing, and would necessitate all the processes and accessories that operation entails. The humorous features of such a scene

would come out very strongly, too. We do not know if by "Jerusalem and all Judea" both sexes are to be understood.

With the exception of one minor sect, which we understand still insists on immersion, conducted, however, for the most part indoors, Christians have resolved this rite of baptism into the diminutive but decidedly more convenient shape of sprinkling, performed upon us when infants; a dwindling and shrinking of original Christianity that by no means stands alone, and which, in this, as in many other cases, is a vast improvement. Besides, these shrinkings are more than made up for in current Christianity by some copious enlargements and expansions in other directions.

Whether the phrase "the heavens were opened" should be read in an astronomical or in a theological sense we cannot tell; the words "he saw," too, would almost lead us to interpret them in the sense that he only saw, did we not read elsewhere that John also saw this occurrence, and was even apprised by God himself beforehand, that it was about to take place.

As these are amongst the very few words we possess spoken, without intermediary, direct from the First Person of the Trinity, it is to be regretted we cannot feel sure we have the exact words themselves. For here they seem addressed not to Jesus, but to someone else. "This is my beloved Son." In the next Gospel we find them addressed to Jesus directly, "Thou art my beloved Son." Our only object in noticing this discrepancy is to point out how little hope there is to suppose ourselves in the possession of the precise words spoken by Jesus himself.

It is, we think, very pleasing to learn from this, that the parental fondness so characteristic of human fathers, more especially in the case of an only son, is a sentiment shared and sanctioned by Jehovah himself. We all know that man was made in the image of God. The resemblance is often wonderfully close.

We meet with the Baptist but once again in our narrative. And alas! that we should do so. Alas, for the feebleness of human faith; for the scepticism of the greatest man born of woman! After the immense incident just recorded our faith in human nature is shattered by reading that this "same John" sent some of his disciples to Jesus with the dreadful message, "Art thou he, or do we look for another?"

What an assurance, Reader, John had here received! He had

¹⁷ And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

witnessed, as Trinitarian Christians are fond of pointing out, had seen and heard, the recognition of the Second Person of the Trinity by the First, by means of the Third. It is impossible even to Jehovah ever to honour a member of our race more greatly. And yet poor John fell into scepticism. It is customary in some of their moods for Christian writers to profess astonishment that men now doubt Jesus; though our faith is based only and solely on Greek manuscripts. When we reflect that the great bulk of those who knew Jesus personally did not believe in him, and that the most prominent of those who did were repeatedly, in spite of the most extraordinary assurances, falling into scepticism as shown to us even in these friendly Gospels, the really astonishing thing is, not that the quantity and the quality of the faith in Jesus now existing should be so little and so weak but rather that it should amount even to the modest dimensions it does.

MATTHEW IV.

THE celebrity who divided the Christian Scriptures into chapters

CHAPTER IV.
 1 *Christ fasteth, and is tempted.* 11 *The angels minister unto him.* 13 *He dwelleth in Capernaum,* 17 *beginneth to preach,* 18 *calleth Peter and Andrew,* 21 *James and John,* 23 *and healeth all the diseased.*

1 Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

was not happy in his work generally, but he deserves a word of praise here. For the opening of a new chapter somewhat serves to break to us what would otherwise feel a breath-taking transition. In the last verse God was speaking to Jesus out of the clouds; in this very next Jesus is on his way to the wilderness to be confronted with—yes, Reader,—with the Devil himself.

The bound made from the second to the third chapter in our narrative was a great one; thirty years is a long stride to make at once. But the transition we are here called upon to realize is far more prodigious; its extreme character, the most extreme we can conceive, and its suddenness combine to give us quite a mental shock.

It is, we think, far the best to leave such enigmas as “led up of the spirit” unattempted at explanation. Commentators offer us a number of subtleties on the point that only tend to worsen matters. No doubt the phrase is ostensibly and presumably used

by our author to give us information; but like many other phrases in his record it serves only to bewilder us.

“Lead us not into temptation” is a form of prayer we find Jesus recommending to his hearers. He himself, however, as we here read, was led into the wilderness expressly “to be tempted.” When we call to mind that we are told on authority that God cannot be tempted with evil, it is indeed astonishing to read that Jesus was led into the wilderness “to be tempted.” There being no possible chance of temptation’s having the slightest effect or success upon him, his submitting to the process, nay, his going into the wilderness for the very purpose is entirely unintelligible, and, we must own, is far from edifying reading.

Whatever may be our thoughts concerning the motive and purpose of Jesus in seeking this famous interview, we are, we presume, at full liberty to speculate upon the motives and the object animating the Devil in becoming a party to it. It is not clear whether Satan was apprised of Jesus’ intention and knowingly assented to the meeting, or whether he ignorantly fell into the matter, being led thereto by what seemed a good opportunity. We know from the book of Job that Satan joined what appear to have been periodical meetings between the “Sons of God” and God himself, and we observe how very free and extremely candid the conversation that then took place was. Judging from this, it seems more probable to suppose that this meeting in the wilderness was by arrangement. But whichever theory we adopt the conduct of Satan is also totally unintelligible. An attempt to seduce the Second Person of the Trinity, knowing there was not the shadow of a possibility of success, did Satan little credit.

The odd information that Jesus fasted forty nights as well as
2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. forty days, is followed by the equally odd statement that he was afterward hungry. Whether we should be right in inferring that Jesus did not suffer from hunger during this long fast, but only at its close, we cannot say. The application to the non-natural of any or all of our human faculties is of no use. Experience, inference, induction, deduction, logic, mathematics, and indeed all our powers melt away when we touch the miraculous, or as many think, the miraculous melts away when it touches them. It may be just observed that this fast is not considered to be beyond mere human competence.

These two mighty Beings approach each other without ceremony.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But we must remember they were no strangers.

In Heaven, in happier days, they had known each other well. Jesus himself tells us that he saw his companion fall like lightning from

Heaven. Before he raised the standard of revolt there, Satan must as a great Archangel have been intimate with Jesus. And even since that deplorable event took place they were, as we have pointed out, in the habit of occasionally coming together. They therefore now meet, speak, and move about in what strikes us as a very unembarrassed manner.

Satan opens the conversation. And it must be admitted he does so discourteously by raising doubt as to Jesus' identity; at any rate his opening sentence is capable of that interpretation. We all know, however, that Satan knew the fact perfectly, for we shall find that even his subordinates everywhere knew and recognized Jesus. Knowing or inferring that Jesus was suffering hunger, Satan invites him to convert some stones into bread. Apart from the person advising, there was no harm in this recommendation; for we shall find that the bread-making power possessed by Jesus was signally exercised by him more than once. The subject of enduring self-inflicted and preventible pain as shown by Jesus in this fast we leave to another opportunity.

Jesus replies to this and to the other temptations with a passage from Deuteronomy. We shall make no attempt, Reader, to conceal our disappointment at this. We should have expected on a memorable occasion like this something original, something special to the occasion. We say plainly that these quotations from the Pentateuch feel to us exceedingly stilted and flat. No doubt Christian commentators assure us that these texts were just the very things to use to Satan. But then those profound and pious men will keep forgetting that ordinary men have not their fine spiritual discernment, and that they cannot perceive the wonderful fitnesses so apparent to the eye of faith.

Whilst we are unable to see the pertinence of this quotation considered as a rejoinder to Satan, we are equally unable to gather any practical lesson from it. It is obvious enough that bread is only one of man's many needs. But the announcement that we

are to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is too portentous for us to cope with. No doubt to the Jews Jehovah was at times very communicative; but even they would not claim to possess his every word. As for the remainder of our race, to them, so far as we know, Jehovah never spoke. And even with the Jews he is considered to have long ago broken off communication, a view there is only too much reason to regard as well founded.

Up to the time of this conversation between Jesus and Satan the great majority of men had been compelled to live without any knowledge of Jehovah's sayings, and had managed to do so. And what is more, in spite of that grievous deprivation their modes of life compared very favourably, in some cases extremely favourably, with the lives of those children of Israel who had had sole possession of the divine utterances.

Leaving the wilderness together, Jesus and Satan proceed—or as it is here worded, “the devil taketh him”—to Jerusalem, locating themselves—or, again, as it is here given, Satan “setteth him”—upon a pinnacle of the temple. We have here surely got into some very painful matter. Christian commentators very wisely get away from it as early as practicable.

A little reflection, however, soon reassures us that in spite of the very unpleasant phraseology here made use of, this accompanying of his visitor on the part of Jesus, must have been in its ultimate sense, voluntary. Thus viewed, it was a surprising and most urbane condescension upon the part of Jesus, not without bearing, perhaps, upon the theory of those who say that even Satan will be finally restored. What strange feelings these two mighty personages must have had as they thus journeyed together! The thought of these two Beings whose great object was to thwart each other—Satan trying to spoil the work of Jesus, Jesus come to earth to undo Satan's—thus journeying to Jerusalem together, is indeed calculated to amaze us. If it be possible for us to learn a lesson from such proceedings, it is surely the lesson that the most extreme antagonism is not inconsistent with much outward civility and complaisance.

Having placed Jesus upon this temple pinnacle, Satan invites him to cast himself down, apparently by way of pure experiment. The point of this is far from

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple.

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of

God, cast thyself down : for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee : and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

evident ; for surely beings who had no difficulty or danger in getting up to this pinnacle could have none in coming down. And it is out of question to suppose that Satan thought Jesus had less power over the law of gravitation than that possessed by himself. Following the example set by Jesus, and in support, we presume, of his suggestion of a vault from the pinnacle, Satan proceeds also to quote scripture. The Devil quoting scripture has been a recognized source of amusement in every age ; and even amidst the portentous surroundings in which it here took place, it is impossible to suppress an expanding countenance as we think of it. Satan quotes from the book of Psalms, thus showing a very popular preference. We do not know how far it is wise or safe to accept him as a scripture expositor. On reference to the passage in question and its context we cannot discover any humanly traceable reference to Jesus. There is, however, nothing surprising in this. Satan's exegesis is entirely in accordance with an extremely well-known system—that theory known by the names of double, inner, or hidden meanings which in skilful hands has yielded such truly remarkable results.

Ignoring alike Satan's suggestion and his quotation Jesus cites another passage of Deuteronomy which is, at any rate, more appropriate than the preceding one he used. Still, if what is stated in the first verse of this chapter be correct, that Jesus went to the wilderness in order to be tempted of the devil, where is the point of complaining of Satan for doing what he had been purposely encountered to do ? The proceeding would have been a failure and a disappointment if Satan had not appeared, or appearing, had not gone through his part. The entire occurrence is humiliating enough to both, without being rendered any more so by fault finding or reproaches.

His second attempt having also failed Satan now tries a third. The two temptations he had hitherto suggested to Jesus were of an extremely paltry type ; the second one reading more like a piece of jeering banter than anything else. At this third attempt Satan certainly brings forward something of a more attractive and beguiling kind, namely, the kingdoms of the world together with the glory of them.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them :

Evidently acting upon the well-known fact that absent things however described have not the effect that things present to the senses give, Satan decides to bring and display before Jesus the articles of allurements mentioned in this verse. In order to do this he takes Jesus up "into an exceeding high mountain," a mountain which has afforded theologians much concern and sceptics much merriment.

Our author, unless he had a description of the event he is here narrating from Jesus himself, must clearly have received his information by means of some other form of heavenly inspiration. This inspiration, as we all know, whilst imparting spiritual things took great, not to say extreme, care not to impart any natural knowledge. Hence throughout all divine scripture we see intermixed the ignorance and even the mistaken notions current at the time. This strange and most deplorable fact we have, however, no choice but to take as we find it.

To men who thought the earth a flat and who had but nebulous ideas of even the then existing kingdoms of the world, as was the case with the Jews of that day, the thought of inspecting those kingdoms from the top of an exceeding high mountain was a possible conception, though even then surely a rather childish one. To us moderns, who know that the highest mountain is a mere speck on the surface of a globe, and who remember that if they kept on the mountain top Jesus and Satan would simply revolve along with it, the picture here laid before us is too rapid to dwell upon; and if we are to try to realize at all what is here stated we must frame to ourselves the best notions we can under such conditions.

Seeing that the immense, the colossal, power here exhibited was the power of hell not of heaven, there can of course be no irreverence in our wondering how it was exerted. Did Satan cause the earth to turn itself round so as to show its varied kingdoms, or did he cause Jesus and himself to revolve around it? We are told in another Gospel that Satan performed this exploit, however accomplished, in a moment of time. The power—little short of omnipotence—thus ascribed to Satan is certainly astounding. It is difficult for us to imagine how the power of Jehovah himself can be greater. The achievements of Jesus himself narrated in these Gospels, regarded as examples of miracle power, are mere details, absolute trifles in comparison.

Such were the wares laid before Jesus by Satan in this third essay. But surely they were no new sight to Jesus. On the contrary, we all know that Jesus already knew all about these kingdoms, at least as well as Satan did. Nor is this all. We are asked to picture to ourselves a scene in which the Creator of the Universe is being attempted to be lured and ensnared with an offer of some microscopic bits of his own work; such veritable trivialities as the kingdoms of our puny planet. We are called upon to picture the Creator of the Milky Way being "tempted" by an offer of the government of India, China, Rome, and Peru!

Having displayed these enticements before Jesus, Satan proceeds to make him an offer of the whole of them, subject, however, to one condition. And here it is not possible to avoid raising the question, had Satan really the power to give these things? Is he the real King of Kings? or was the claim an impudent pretence on the part of Satan, he having no such power? If, as some think, the latter was the real state of affairs, where was the temptation of an offer which Jesus knew Satan had not the power to make good? In going through these Gospels, the very curious and interesting problem of the mixed jurisdiction in earthly affairs of the celestial and the infernal authorities often presents itself.

The condition attached by Satan to the offer here made is enough to stun and appal, not only pious, but even ordinary readers. To boldly ask the Second Person of the Trinity to fall down and worship him, shows us that there are no limits to Satan's daring; no lengths of impiety and impertinence to which he is not prepared to go. There can, however, be no doubt that the entire absence of fear, the absolute and unqualified courage, and the consistent refusal to cringe shown here and everywhere else by Satan, form the explanation of that curious undercurrent of good-humoured popularity he has undoubtedly enjoyed amongst men in every age.

The reply to this supreme insult made by Jesus is most tame and disappointing. It is another passage from Deuteronomy. We have already seen that that book had no terrors for Satan. Nor are we able to express any surprise at this. The only kind of dismay the book of Deuteronomy is calculated to

9 And saith unto him,
All these things will I
give thee, if thou wilt fall
down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus
unto him, Get thee hence,
Satan: for it is written,
Thou shalt worship the
Lord thy God, and him
only shalt thou serve.

produce in readers of it is unfortunately of a very different kind to the sort that was needed here. It is not a book likely to make any great impression for good even upon much humbler beings than Satan.

Jesus accompanied, or rather preceded, his quotation with the command "Get thee hence, Satan." Does it not seem a great pity that this command was given; that permission to go "hence" was ever accorded, Reader? Omnipotence had here received at the hand of the Father of Evil the worst affront conceivable; and yet instead of being crushed on the spot, Satan is bidden to begone. Who can call to mind all that Satan has wrought amongst us since; all the struggling with sin and misery since—and yet to be—undergone, and not feel that the source of it all might and ought to have been here stayed and quenched for ever?

The word inscrutable is the favourite one with theologians for application to the ways of Heaven in cases of embarrassment. It would be well if inscrutability were all those ways ailed. The toleration by an Omnipotent being of a great Enemy—with, as we shall see, an immense array of subordinates—who is constantly engaged in wrecking his purposes; tempting and ruining creatures he loves; thwarting his objects at every point; rendering his Universe a horrid blend of good and evil; and finally mocking and insulting himself, is not intelligible. When presented to the human mind for acceptance, the human mind revolts from it. Nor is it of the smallest use to here bring forward that old reason-stifler—the limitation of the human faculties. That plea may do for "difficulties," but it is of no use whatever for a contradiction in terms; which the tolerance of evil by an almighty good being remains after all the subterfuges which ever have been or ever can be applied to it, and after all the mental and moral chicanery which has been or ever yet may be bestowed upon it.

Whether Satan had exhausted his stock of allurements, or come to the conclusion that further attempts would be fruitless; whether he was getting wearied with quotations from Deuteronomy, or whether he regarded the command of Jesus to begone as an injunction to be obeyed is left an open matter. Be this as it may, Satan now disappeared. After this event we hear no more of him in his personal capacity throughout these Gospels until quite the end. But we encounter his subordinate devils in nearly every paragraph.

¹¹ Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

And in the end Satan effected a great stroke, which would, we fancy, make up for any discomfiture he may have considered he met with in the wilderness. For he "entered into" one of Jesus' own chosen twelve, causing that Apostle to betray Jesus and thus bring about the Master's death. Whether this, however, was in reality a triumph for Satan, or not, we are unable to clearly make out; for the gospel theory is not one very easy to comprehend. Jesus, if we understand that theory aright, came to earth not only willing to be, but desiring to be, and for the very purpose of being, put to death. If this be so, Satan's exploit was an assistance towards, instead of a thwarting of the object of Jesus; though the very odious way of bringing the event about—making one of Jesus' own disciples act such a part—would seem to be peculiarly Satan's own.

But in these Gospels, Reader, the actions of the infernal are as little intelligible as those of the celestial powers. The common-sense element—the clear pursuit of and the bringing about of ends by what seem obviously the best means—is strikingly deficient in both. And even if we grant that the methods thus adopted are in reality most masterly strategy, have a merit, a depth, and an applicability beyond our ken, it is at least most unfortunate that they have the poor and meagre look they have.

A very pleasing incident is now recorded. After his fast and interview with Satan were ended, some "angels came and ministered" unto Jesus. This troop of angels is most agreeable to read and think of. How often do we feel in reading this Gospel narrative that such a visit was the precise thing needed, and its non-appearance most unaccountable!

It does not seem clear whether when these angels came to him, Jesus was still on the exceeding high mountain where Satan had left him, or he had returned to the wilderness. It is evident that this pleasing visitation came to an end before Jesus came back amongst men, otherwise there would have been some danger of these angels being seen. Possibly, however, those beings may be able to make themselves invisible; a power, we presume, Jesus and Satan must also have exercised when on the pinnacle of the temple.

If, as seems possible, Satan met this troop of his old colleagues in heaven on their way to visit Jesus, how they must have derided his fatuous attempt to seduce the king of heaven!

We shall find that the word Behold was a great favourite with our author. So fond was he of it that he uses it often where it is peculiarly incongruous. When we remember that during the whole of the gospel history the appearances of angels, with the exception perhaps of the pool-angel, were never in public but always in private the word behold! thus applied to them is full of quiet if unintended irony.

And now in conclusion, Reader, what can we think, what can we say, of such a narrative as this before us? The Creator of the vast Universe and the Author of Evil meet together in a wilderness in Asia. From thence they proceed together to the top of the Jerusalem temple and thence to the top of a high mountain where they separate. The object of this meeting and what took place thereat we have already dwelt upon. Some writers tell us that such a record ought to fill us with solemn awe. We are unable to agree with that opinion. For ourselves we can only say that it fills us with a sentiment of an entirely different kind. We leave to others to say for themselves with what the narrative fills them.

Even as a narrative it does not possess the minor merit of being interesting. As with the "perils" of the Infancy, which had not the smallest real danger in them, so here the knowledge that temptation could not possibly have any effect upon Jesus, the knowledge that he was incapable of sinning and falling renders an account of temptation as applied to him a meaningless insipidity. The consent of Jesus to go through such a process is indeed far the most unpleasant feature of this ugly transaction. The consent of Satan to go through a proceeding of such a kind shows that his enormous miracle-power is but very scantily accompanied with discretion and good sense.

The additional information regarding this memorable meeting between Jesus and Satan found in the accounts of it given in the two next Gospels does not add much to our knowledge of it. With regard to the origin of this interview, here ascribed to Jesus being "led up of the spirit" we read in the next Gospel the curious phrase "and immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness." It is also there added that in the wilderness Jesus "was with the wild beasts."

From the third Gospel we learn that Jesus' forty days' fast was an absolute one; "he did eat nothing." The second and third of Satan's temptations as here given are also there transposed, from

which we learn that absolute accuracy is not a gospel essential; a surprising and disappointing fact of which we find only too many other illustrations.

The most noticeable item in the third Gospel account of this event is the statement of Satan when offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world. "All this power will I give thee and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it." If this be at all a correct version of what Satan said it is certainly surprising that with his well known ability in such a matter he did not word his statement rather better. The entire sentence has a very laboured and made-up look about it. But its import is certainly clear enough.

The claim thus made by Satan, being merely an assertion of the Father of Lies, need not of itself, perhaps, disturb us. But it is very disconcerting to find so much in Scripture that confirms this claim; and especially the acknowledgment of Jesus himself that Satan is the Prince of this world. Satan, too, must have known that to tell Jesus a falsehood was entirely useless.

Perhaps earthly potentates may find some comfort from the contrary Apostolic assurance that all the powers that be are ordained of God. There is not a little in history that would lead us to think that the conflict admittedly existing in other matters between the celestial and infernal powers has largely affected political and state affairs; and that sometimes the one and sometimes the other of these powers had the best of it. Since the foremost nations of the world discarded the notions both of divine right and its opposite in these things, and, disregarding existing powers, if unsatisfactory, wherever they may have come from, have replaced them with republics and kingdoms based upon the will and vote of the people, there has been a happy and wonderful improvement in the character of earthly authorities.

In the third Gospel, too, this singular occurrence is closed by the statement that after the Devil had ended his "temptation" of Jesus "he departed from him for a season." Whether the natural inference that Satan was not altogether discouraged and renewed his temptation is a sound one who can say? Let us hope he did not.

This strange narrative is very conspicuously absent from all modern Christian reference and allusion. In sermons, in books, and in conversation it is shunned as an awkward and intractable



subject. Christian commentators who are obliged to deal with it are ill at ease upon it; and their trouble what to say of it and their anxiety to get away from it are very visible.

Nor can this be wondered at. The picture of the Creator of the Universe and the Father of Evil standing side by side on a pinnacle of the Jerusalem temple is a severe, not to say dangerous, demand even on the most elastic faith. It is not surprising that some bold believers have sought relief from such a strain by pronouncing the occurrence a vision or an allegory. If such it be, a most poverty-stricken one it assuredly is, Reader.

Here, as elsewhere in these Gospels, we find Jesus represented as receiving information, and the receipt of it influencing his actions. Upon us, who, thanks to theologians, now know that it was not possible for Jesus to receive any information, the effect of this mode of narration is somewhat droll; the idea of Omniscience hearing news, however we try to suppress it, irresistibly relaxes our countenances. The words "when" and "heard" therefore as applied to Jesus are not to be understood as we should understand them of anyone else. Before Jesus "heard" of John's misfortune he was of course well aware of it; indeed, knew before it took place that it was about to take place; knew, without going further back than the proximate cause of it, that the dancing of Herodias' daughter was going to bring this imprisonment and its ghastly upshot to pass.

We can form but slender notions of time, of duration, and of interval, from records couched in the style of these Gospels, but we should naturally infer that John must have lain in prison altogether for a long time; for it is not until we reach the middle of this Gospel that word is brought to Jesus of the dreadful fate of John. Does it not feel cold, Reader, to think of John thus left in prison, and to his sad fate, without a helping hand of any kind? We read in the book of Acts how prisons, prison doors, gaolers, guards and stocks were all vain to hold Jesus' own disciples; these exploits, indeed, being even tediously repeated. Whilst Jesus, as we read in this chapter, was performing miracles broadcast, John was left neglected in his cell at Macherus. "I was in prison, and ye visited me not." This, according to Jesus, is one of the heaviest indictments he will himself bring against mortals at the day of judgment.

12 ¶ Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

It is in every way best for us not to ponder upon or attempt to understand the interferences and non-interventions of Heaven in human affairs. We are at one with theologians in regarding them as inscrutable. We do not know how far they would be at one with us in the use of one or two other adjectives more distinctly descriptive. Centuries after the time we are here dealing with, Jesus' own followers, of different kinds, were constantly leading each other to the stake; both the led and the leading being alike in his name. But not a beckon or a sign did Heaven ever vouchsafe upon those appalling scenes, though on both sides the parties there-to were "gathered together in my name."

It may here be observed that this arrest of John brought his mission to a very premature close. His preparation of the way and straightening of the paths for Jesus were, as we shall see in the sequel, only too incomplete.

Leaving his home, the home of his mother, his sisters, and his brethren in Nazareth, Jesus now came and

13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;

16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

"dwelt" in Capernaum. The very natural efforts we make to realize the meaning of the word "dwelt" can now never be gratified. Instead of giving us information that would have been extremely interesting our author gives us some more Old Testament instead; and gives it with that free hand and disdain of the strict letter so characteristic of him. It is melancholy to learn, as we shall later on, that this great light was thrown away upon Capernaum. From some cause or other the people there who saw the great light were not impressed with

it. It appears to have seemed to them, even at first hand, what to so many ever since it has seemed as transmitted, but a dim light. For this non-appreciation of him, Jesus tells us that there remains a fate in store for poor Capernaum, compared to which even that awaiting Sodom and Gomorrah shall be "more tolerable." In the whole history of blessings in disguise and fatal favours, there is no match to this. It is also curious to reflect that heavenly light, like humbler illuminations, may be very transient, and be followed by darkness again. The lands here named, once so brightly illumined, are now amongst the least enlightened portions of our earth.

Jesus now began his real mission. He began it by proclaiming

to men the same exhortation that John had already proclaimed,

17 ¶ From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The first part of this exhortation, “Repent,” is, alas, at all times applicable to the human race. Men have never yet been what

they ought to be, nor yet what they very well might be. The particular section of our race amongst whom Jesus chose to come and dwell instead of being exceptionally near to ideal perfection, was, as he often himself lamented, a “perverse generation.” If there were any profit or any good in letting our minds dwell upon such things, it would be easy to call to mind places and generations very much more worthy of a visit from our Creator than the ones he selected.

It would be hopeless to attempt to give any exact meaning to the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven,” or “the heavens.” It is an elastic term, used in a variety of senses. It is peculiar to this first Gospel, though very often used in it. It is sometimes made use of to convey the abstract notion of the ideally perfect, the true model, the religious utopia. Sometimes it is used by Jesus as the expression of his own religious system and economy on earth. Sometimes it refers to the personal government of Jehovah; the state of affairs that obtains under his personal sovereignty in heaven.

The sense in which this kingdom was then “at hand” necessarily partakes of the uncertainty and indefiniteness of the kingdom itself. It is impossible to make any precise application of something inherently vague. The early Christians took the words “kingdom” and “at hand” in the literal sense. Time has shown that in this they were labouring under a delusion. The only tangible sense in which the kingdom of heaven was at hand eighteen hundred years ago, was that it was then formally and officially proclaimed and inaugurated by John and by Jesus; in no way enforced, however, but left like other things to establish itself in the world as best it could, in which it has had upon the whole but very indifferent success.

The calling by Jesus of his first four disciples—two pairs of

brothers—is now recorded. It is a very slight simple narrative which we may fill up in imagination almost any way. Whether this was the first time these four disciples—his four chief disciples—had seen or heard of Jesus

18 ¶ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

we can do no more than conjecture. Jesus summons them in an authoritative way; the unquestioning manner in which they yield response is usually ascribed to supernatural agency, whether rightly so need not be discussed.

The point of most interest in this account is as to what is meant by "followed him." Does it mean that they simply joined the teaching of Jesus, adhering to their ordinary avocations, family ties, and other worldly and external habits and customs; or does it mean that they absolutely "left all" and accompanied, perhaps dwelt with, Jesus? It is a matter of just and great regret that even elementary facts like these cannot be ascertained from these Gospels. Much may be said against each supposition and much in favour of each; though towards the end it seems clear these disciples followed and accompanied Jesus in the strict sense of the words. It is clear that in a worldly sense these disciples of Jesus had not much to abandon. Their sacrifice in joining Jesus was, on this score, not a great one. Of the antecedents of these four principal disciples we know nothing. It does not transpire whether they were religiously minded men before this call or not. They were full of the petty notions locally current in their time, nor did some years' companionship with Jesus by any means clear them away.

We cannot think Jesus was at all happy in this first of his many similes. Fishing, either as regards the process of taking, or the object of taking, is not very applicable to any kindly intentioned or philanthropic purpose. For in fishing the process is cruel, the result is death to the fish, and the object of the fisher is purely and absolutely selfish. Fishing for men is one of the least felicitous figures of speech we have ever come across. It may be observed that this simile is to be found in the Prophet Jeremiah where, along with it and in the same sense, the analogous simile of hunting is made use of.

The alacrity with which James and John left "the ship and their father," however spiritually admirable, has an unpleasant aspect of its own. Poor old Zebedee! We suppose he was not worth calling. These sons evidently left him to get on with the ship and the net mending as best he could. We own to feeling some sympathy

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.
20 And they straightway left *their* nets and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James *the son of Zebedee*, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.
22 And they im-

mediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

with him, and are sorry we do not hear of him again. We hear, however, of his wife, as we presume we are right in taking "the mother of Zebedee's children" to have been. She came along with these two sons, to whom Jesus gave the name of sons of Thunder, on one occasion to ask a favour of Jesus; a request in which she was not successful.

It would have been interesting to know what the "gospel of the kingdom" as preached at this time by Jesus was like. Long after this period we shall find Jesus forbidding his disciples to tell any man that he was the Christ. It is obvious, therefore, that at this time the teaching of Jesus could not be Christianity in any of its main features as now known to us. This fact of his teaching in their synagogues shows us that either Jesus adhered pretty closely to orthodox Judaism, or that the authorities were remarkably and honourably tolerant.

The probability is that the earlier preaching of Jesus was of the tentative character observable in the case of so many religious reformers. The care which, as we shall see, he took for so long a time to keep his personal character and claims in abeyance, shows a desire, manifest also in many of his earlier sayings, to harmonize the new faith with the old as far as possible, and to make the transition as easy as possible. These efforts, like many others of a like kind, were not a success. Most men are as little disposed to modify their religious belief as to change it altogether. This preaching of an evangel in which the main fact that he was the Christ was kept in reserve, as might have been anticipated, did not avail or propitiate. Jesus and the official representatives of orthodoxy came into open, undisguised, and most bitter hostility, out of which complete Christianity eventually emerged.

Our author now assures us that the fame of Jesus, even at this early period, "went throughout all Syria," and that multitudes came from all parts, including Jerusalem itself, to see and to follow him. It would thus appear that at the very outset of his public career Jesus procured wide fame and renown not merely in his own locality, but throughout the nation, and even in foreign

23 ¶ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan.

parts. How far this is in accordance with the general tone of what we read hereafter in these Gospels: with Jesus' own constant injunctions to secrecy; with the early history of Christianity after his death; and with the entire absence of mention or confirmation in the histories of the period now in our possession, every reader must decide for himself.

When we try to conceive of these great multitudes from all these widespread areas thronging to Capernaum it would seem that the new movement had already assumed vast dimensions and even national importance. It is, however, very evidently necessary to be on our guard in estimating the real meaning of such phrases as "all the people," "great multitudes," and "all Syria." These Gospels are throughout couched in general and often very ambiguous terms. Time, place, dates, and figures are conspicuously wanting, and often seem purposely avoided. The few cases in which numbers are furnished to us are in such matters as the number of the drowned swine, of the people miraculously fed, and the number—153—of the fishes in the miraculous draught.

The extensive commotion that has so often been aroused in given localities by the appearance of supernatural claimants, renders it in no way difficult to conceive that the appearance of Jesus as a prophet, exorcist, and wonder-worker would cause much excitement in the district; an excitement which a comparison of the latter part of this Gospel with its earlier part leads us to the conclusion had much abated as time passed on in the case of Jesus as, indeed, like commotions always do, and usually do rapidly. Marvels require a concurrence of favourable circumstances for their reception, and still more for their continuance; the chief and principal of which is faith. How, when this was wanting in those around, how, because of their unbelief, Jesus could do no mighty work is recorded even in this gospel history.

We now come to the miracles of Jesus with which this Gospel, and especially its earlier portions, are so plentifully studded. They are first presented to us in the aggregate, but a little further on they are given in more or less detail. Sick people of all kinds, we read, were brought to Jesus and he healed them. Three specific ailments, or sufferers therefrom, are specially singled out for mention by our author: the devil-possessed, lunatics, and the palsied. The

object of our author in selecting these three forms of affliction for particular mention is not clear. Probably he considered them three peculiarly formidable ailments to master. To us moderns they have the singular and peculiar misfortune to be the least satisfactory and most equivocal diseases that could be adduced as test subjects for miracle power.

And what, Reader, are we now to think of the first of the three diseases here named—that devil-possession which figures so largely in these Gospels, with which indeed the pages of this first Gospel literally teem? What are we now to think of this ugly and hideous allegation which constantly appears to us in, and literally darkens, the pages of this gospel-record?

Well, for ourselves we can only say that in the sad and lengthy records of human superstition, those of the very lowest savages included, nothing worse, nothing more utterly degrading, is anywhere to be found. And yet the ejection of devils from men, women, aye, and even children, forms far the largest element in the sum total of Jesus' miracles.

To us this one thing throws a strange light over all this gospel narrative. To many thoughtful observers this one thing alone renders this gospel narrative unreceivable as an historical record. And the way in which Christians now shirk the subject and decline to face it or speak of it, and the way in which, if compelled to allude to this prominent gospel feature they choose words best adapted to evade it, are deeply instructive.

Christian faith has much and many things to surmount. But with the exception of those never-cooling furnaces Jesus declares he has in store for all human beings who do not believe him, we doubt if any of the many difficulties the Christian mind and heart have to conquer and embrace is more bitter and more trying than devil-possession.

MATTHEW V.

To the discourse, the apparently continuous discourse, found in this and the two following chapters has been given the name of the sermon on the mount. Whether what we find in these three chapters

CHAPTER V.
1 *Christ beginneth his sermon in the mount.*
3 *declaring who are blessed, 13 who are*

the salt of the earth, 14 the light of the world, the city on an hill, 15 the candle: 17 that he came to fulfil the law. 21 What it is to kill, 27 to commit adultery, 33 to swear; 38 exhorteth to suffer wrong, 44 to love even our enemies, 48 and to labour after perfectness.

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

was really one single uninterrupted address or is simply a collection of the sayings of Jesus grouped together by our author has been much discussed, and is a point upon which good authorities have held opposite views. It may be observed that in the third Gospel what seems unmistakably to be a part of this same "sermon" is found, though much abridged and with many variations; and to this latter the name of the sermon in the plain has often been given. Many other large sections of the sermon now before us are also found scattered in various portions of the third Gospel. Which of these two theories of the sermon before us is the true one is a point into which it is not needful here to enter. Whether the contents of these three chapters were delivered on a mountain or in a plain, and whether they were delivered at one single time or at many are not very material questions. Time and circumstance may, it is true, often have a bearing upon and considerably affect the import of a discourse. But the subjects dealt with and the teachings delivered thereupon in this sermon are in the main independent of such considerations altogether.

The object of Jesus in going up this mountain may have been to escape the pressure and importunings of the multitudes named at the end of the last chapter; or it may have been to enable him to address some portion of these multitudes to better advantage; the latter being the more usual, if not the more probable, supposition.

"And when he was set." Jesus adhered to the Jewish custom of sitting when teaching. Later on we shall find that even when addressing a multitude on the lake shore from a ship he adhered to this custom; a practice that must have detracted in many ways from the effectiveness of a speech. On an occasion of this present kind, indeed at all times, it must have greatly limited the number of Jesus' hearers.

After ascending this mountain and sitting down, Jesus was joined by his disciples. Whom we ought to understand as being meant at this time by that term is not very clear. Our author, who was not at this time a disciple himself, informs us that Jesus opened his mouth and "taught them" by which phrase "his

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

disciples" seem meant; and some few things in the sermon which ensued certainly seem specially addressed to intimate and particular adherents only.

Jesus began his sermon, as the book of Psalms begins, by setting forth the blessedness of certain virtues, of certain states of mind and of heart, and of certain courses of conduct in men. And that that book was in the mind of Jesus and served as a precedent to him is shown by the way in which he immediately proceeds to quote from it.

3 Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed." All virtues and goodness are admittedly blessed, inherently and intrinsically blessed, as are also the frames of mind which lead men to the practice of them. The nobility, the happiness, the wisdom, and the blessedness of being good and doing good for its own sake have been set forth by poets and by philosophers in all ages; and many of these, especially of the poets, have set forth the further recompenses awaiting good deeds hereafter. Whether this latter feature of remuneration hereafter is an elevation of virtue or a detraction therefrom may be variously thought of. That Jesus teaches such an immense requiting and rewarding of virtue hereafter is very evident even in these beatitudes. The extent to which he carries the theory is shown in the sketch of his judgment day given at the end of this Gospel in which the practice and non-practice of even the most elementary virtues are reimbursed with everlasting fire and everlasting bliss respectively. Whether such supposed reinforcements of virtue by Jesus and by other religious founders and law-givers have really furthered the practice of virtue is a point upon which men have entertained widely different opinions.

The first virtue, or at any rate the first frame of mind and heart, singled out by Jesus for his blessing and approbation is that of being "poor in spirit;" for it is very clear that the interpretation which may be given to that phrase will entirely determine its classification as a virtue or otherwise. If by the phrase be meant modesty, humility, and lowly-mindedness, the title of being "poor in spirit" to be placed in the list of blessed things is undoubted. Other shades of meaning of which the phrase, which is in no sense a clear or happy one, is amenable, render it a very equivocal quality; and poor-spiritedness in the sense of self-abasement, abjectness and submissiveness—qualities mankind have only too

often displayed—must be placed in quite another list than that of things to be praised.

Of the eight virtues or qualities singled out by Jesus for the bestowal of his blessing in these “beatitudes,” not more than one or two are of an absolutely good kind; the others are qualities which extend by infinite gradations from being praiseworthy to being reprehensible; and many are the sterling virtues more deserving of praise, of inculcation, and of blessing than those here selected by Jesus for that honour.

The version of this beatitude given in the third Gospel is simply “Blessed be ye poor,” which is followed by “But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation.” This is obviously a very different thought from the poor “in spirit” laid before us here; and we find several of the following beatitudes reported in the third Gospel in a way so materially different from that given by our author that it is impossible to feel ourselves in anything like certain possession of what Jesus really did say.

The reward awaiting the “poor in spirit” is that “their’s is the kingdom of heaven.” The exceedingly elastic nature of the phrase kingdom of heaven which is peculiar to it this Gospel abundantly shows us. Though that kingdom exists upon our earth it is probable that its more literal and ultimate meaning is here intended. We can hardly suppose this one single quality of being poor in spirit is sufficient to secure entry into this kingdom. It may be looked upon as an initial virtue to be duly and adequately added to.

The next quality or condition Jesus proceeds to bless is that of mourning: “Blessed are they that mourn.” Unless we follow other commentators in adding a great many conditions of our own thereto, mourning cannot very well be classed as a virtue or a thing to be desired.

4 Blessed *are* they
that mourn: for they
shall be comforted.

Human sadness and human sorrow arise from so many causes and from causes so various that it is very difficult to understand this general declaration that they that mourn are blessed. At this and at every other moment there are great numbers of human beings in sorrow, trouble, and anguish. These varied sorrows are of every kind, deserved and undeserved, honourable, neutral, and shameful. They are also of every degree, from the keenest agony down to mere dejection.

Could we get at the origin of these varied human sorrows, they

would divide themselves amidst endless other characteristics, into two main divisions; the sorrows deserving of our sympathy, and those that are not. Towards many of the former our hearts would completely go forth, for unmerited suffering melts men as nothing else can. Not so, however, with deserved sorrow; for though we may pity even here, the feeling is altogether a different one. The just satisfaction of seeing wrong-doing meet with an adequate recompense cannot be put aside by the most compassionate natures.

It is, therefore, not easy to comprehend the general blessing here awarded to mourning by Jesus. It is possible, no doubt, to take the statement as a declaration, as a method of saying, that mourning is a blessed thing in itself for human beings to undergo; a good experience; a salutary discipline. Solomon has recorded a very sweeping maxim concerning the superiority of sorrow to joy. And moralists of all nations, the Stoics especially, have laid great emphasis upon the virtues and the benefits of sorrow and suffering; much greater stress indeed than is warranted.

For the value and the uses of adversity are pleasing and soothing doctrines very comfortable to dwell upon in times thereof, and consequently commonly expanded to a much greater degree than facts will warrant. The wholesomeness of adversity belongs to the great army of half-truths even at best. Whilst some kinds of sorrow, especially the more sentimental ones, may tend to elevate and purify, many other kinds even when nobly borne tend to nothing of the kind. Adversity of some species may, and often does, prove beneficial; other species are as near an approach to unmixed evil as anything in this world can be.

“For they shall be comforted.” The happiness of all sentient beings, the comforting of all sorrowers, the making happy all the unhappy is an amiable and captivating picture that all men may breathe a heartfelt Amen to. Unhappily it is not possible to take this kindly looking promise in its full and literal sense. For we are all mourners. Some of us have or seem to have more and greater sorrows than others, though many good thinkers have held that there is a strong natural tendency to an equilibrium of joy and sorrow with all of us; that there are at work self-adjusting and compensating forces which tend to produce a balance on this matter, and which render human lives and experiences much more equal on the whole than outwardly appears to be the case.

Whatever may be the truth of this view it is impossible to deny

the title of mourner to any human being. But though Jesus possesses the power to comfort every sorrower without exception, the remainder of this Gospel history shows us only too clearly to what a small number that beneficent power will be applied and the lamentable fate of all others. This promise to comfort mourners is thus a contingent one. Upon what it is contingent, and the special character of the mourning promised to be comforted by Jesus, Christian commentators duly set before us.

The version of this beatitude given us in the third Gospel is: "Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh."

The third quality blessed by Jesus is that of meekness. It certainly appears to us that this is practically the same quality and frame of mind which Jesus had already blessed in the first instance.

⁵ Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

The difference between being poor in spirit and being meek may possibly be a real one. But it is a somewhat minute one; a difference which exists in and depends upon somewhat fine, not to say subtle, shades of meaning.

There are virtues more necessary, more important, and more imperative, but there is no virtue more lovable than true modesty. According to many Christian commentators, however, the meekness here inculcated is to be understood in a special sense to which the term religious meekness may be given. Man is not only to think humbly of himself, but especially, according to one school of piety, he ought to think very wretchedly of himself; ought to look upon himself as a very sinful, degraded, and depraved being. Hence we read of certain eminent Christians that they claimed to be vile worms, unfit even for heaven's mercy; a claim which, in our estimation, they have entirely failed to substantiate, for they seem to have been really excellent men though inordinately ambitious on the subject of their status in the next world—a weakness found in earnest believers of all creeds.

It is, of course, impossible to positively define what Jesus meant by the term meek; but we much doubt the soundness of the exegesis of which we have just spoken. Jesus assures us that he himself was meek and lowly; and we cannot possibly apply such an interpretation of the quality of meekness as that referred to, in his case. This assurance of Jesus that he himself was meek shows us that meekness is a quality not unbecoming even our Creator. And we shall find in the later portion of this Gospel that meekness

is a quality not in any way incompatible with other qualities of the sternest and apparently most antithetical nature.

But however much alike the virtues of being poor in spirit and of being meek may seem to be, the recompenses declared by Jesus to await each of those virtues respectively are very noticeably and very strikingly different. To the former quality is awarded the kingdom of heaven; to the latter the inheritance of the earth. It may be that these rewards in each case are not the sole ones. It is possible that both prizes, with others not named, may fall to the lot of the happy possessors of each of these virtues. None the less, the special rewards named and allotted to each of these excellencies are remarkably and conspicuously unlike as applied to qualities that so resemble each other.

“For they shall inherit the earth.” In the psalm from which this is quoted the complete sentence is, “But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” At first sight no reward of the virtue of meekness that could be suggested seems less apposite than that of inheriting the earth; and it must be owned that meekness is a virtue not very likely to achieve that end of itself. For it must be sorrowfully admitted that in the history of our globe hitherto it has been the reverse of the meek who have done the lion’s share of inheriting the earth. It has been the self-asserting, the pushing, the pretentious, and the unscrupulous who have in the main inherited our earth, who have appropriated the chief good things it contains, and who have acquired the powers that be of all kinds therein.

And yet there can be no question that in these later ages the selfish qualities we have just named have been slowly and gradually, but very surely, waning in potency and efficacy; and that the power and influence of quiet, modest, and unobtrusive men have been, and are, growing and spreading. Each generation of men seems happily to be less and less tolerant of self-exaltation, and less and less disposed, even in the most worthy cases, to the mischievous practice of hero making and hero worshipping. And as an accompaniment of other qualities deserving recognition, no characteristic is more loved and esteemed by men now than that of modesty.

Hence this fine old prophecy made nearly three thousand years ago and here endorsed by Jesus is, in a measure, receiving a tardy but genuine fulfilment. And understood in the best sense of the

word meek, "the meek shall inherit the earth," is a noble prediction which every good man will help to verify.

The fourth disposition in men, to which Jesus awards his blessing, is that of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. By some Christian commentators the expression "hunger and thirst after righteousness" is considered a very powerful and very felicitous one. Those who can derive encouragement in so excellent a search from the metaphor here used to that end, do well to dwell upon it.

Those in whom the sense of justice and righteousness has been keenest have unhappily been doomed in this world to much suffering and disappointment; though it may be thankfully owned, a disappointment in these latter centuries which has been ever lessening from one generation to another. Even the mere records of some of the obsolete iniquities of the past, such as slavery and torture for example, make us shudder.

And yet it must be owned that the world of our own day offers much to pain and distress all in whom a love of justice and righteousness is strong, and who yearn to see equity reign where it is still contemned. We are amongst those whose faith is firm in the ultimate triumph of every form of righteousness to which the power of man himself extends. But so long as the operations of Nature herself involve the iniquities they do, we have no faith in the possibility of our earth ever being a theatre of pure righteousness.

"They shall be filled" is a promise, therefore, that neither in its minor individual sense nor in its greater general sense can be regarded as realizable in this world. How far the principles laid down in this Gospel by Jesus, or those laid down by other religious founders as intended to be carried out in the next world are likely, if acted upon, to fill men whose sense of righteousness is deep and strong is a melancholy topic into which it is not the place here to enter.

The version of this beatitude found in the third Gospel resolves it, as was the case with the first beatitude, into a purely natural condition merely. "Blessed are ye that hunger now for ye shall be filled." And, as in the preceding case, this is shortly followed by a denunciation of its opposite state, "Woe unto you that are

full, for ye shall hunger;" a phrase that could clearly have no reference to hungering for righteousness.

The next excellence upon which Jesus bestows his blessing is that of being merciful. The lovable quality of mercy has been so extolled in all ages: its praises have ever been sung by poets, and especially by the greatest of them, with such exquisite beauty of thought and of language, that we must own this bald praise of mercy here given by Jesus feels singularly tame and ordinary. If this ejaculation were regarded as proceeding from human lips alone it would have been considered as, however amiable, too jejune to merit notice. It is only to its fancied procession from more than human lips, and to that alone, that this most commonplace sentiment owes all the exceptional beauty and lustre it wears in Christian eyes.

Ah, Reader, how much the many "holy scriptures" cherished by mankind owe their brilliant hues in their believers' eyes to this same supposition solely.

The recompense Jesus declares to await the merciful is that they shall obtain mercy. It would certainly require a very perverted imagination to suppose that the merciful would be unmercifully treated. They are to be repaid in kind: to experience the virtue they have practised—an appropriate but extremely prosaic recompense.

Towards the end of this Gospel, Reader, we shall find ourselves horrified at the kind of "mercy" Jesus announces his intention of showing to sinners at his judgment day. It is none other, alas! than everlasting fire.

It is greatly to be feared that "the pure in heart" must be regarded as descriptive of ideal human beings only. We cannot stretch even our charity so far as to suppose there ever has been, or stretch our hope to thinking there ever will be, a concrete illustration of human purity of heart. Indeed, if we understand the doctrine of original sin aright, that most unfortunate primary fact of itself excludes the possibility of an absolutely pure human heart; though theologians assure us that Jesus, who was absolutely pure from all personal sin, was though inheriting from his mother the complete human and Adamic nature, free also from the Adamic taint which

7 Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

all others born of women have inevitably inherited. They do not, of course, explain how this was accomplished.

The familiar figure of speech by which the heart—which we are told on high authority is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked—is made the seat and origin of our emotions and actions, is in some respects, at least, not a useful one. It is the mind that really controls these things, and it is to their thoughts men should give heed. To be pure minded is the goal upon which our attentions should be concentrated, for purity of thought—the steady persistent rejection and exclusion of undesirable thoughts of all kinds—is what we can best aim at.

The most eminent, if not the chief, Apostle of Jesus has a curious saying that to the pure all things are pure; a saying which seems to us almost an inversion of the real facts. It is to the impure that all things are indiscriminately pure; whilst it is to the pure, or those who make the nearest approach to that state, that so many things seem and feel so unbearably impure.

The reward assigned to the pure in heart—or, as that is a condition not absolutely attainable, to those presumably who make all practicable approach to that state—is certainly a very startling one: “they shall see God.” A sight, in any real sense, of the King of Heaven and the Creator of the Universe would certainly seem a rich reimbursement for any sacrifices incurred in earning the condition precedent thereto. For we cannot suppose that by seeing God, a mere glimpse of the Divine Majesty is meant, but rather a perennial beholding. As a rule, however, Christian commentators, by their system of “inner” meanings, spiritualize this promised spectacle into very tame and cloudy mysticism.

As a matter of fact, as we now know, these very hearers of this sermon were actually listening to, and looking at, God, though not aware of the amazing fact. For it must be admitted that the divine effulgence was so completely shrouded in the human form of Jesus that few of those who personally knew him, not his own brethren even, were aware of, or suspected, the great fact Trinitarian theology has so manifestly established. We read, too, in Scripture—in spite of what is stated in the fourth Gospel—that to a certain ancient, to whom much stretching of the term pure in heart would be needed in order to be adjusted, there was vouchsafed a glimpse of the first person of the Divine Trinity even. A great many also who were not pure in heart saw Jesus very often.

Like the preceding beatitudes of modesty and of mercy, this of peacemaking has ever been a favourite with mankind. No doubt the opposite combative and martial virtues have in all ages been immensely eulogized; but it has been mainly because those qualities have been regarded as imperatively necessary and consequently needful to be inculcated. Peace and friendship, as the writings of all ages show us, are the things men have ever really loved and ever had at heart.

9 Blessed *are* the
peacemakers: for they
shall be called the chil-
dren of God.

It is a mournful reflection that Jesus himself cannot be placed in the blessed category of peacemakers. A very little further on, Reader, we shall be considering his own declaration, "Think not I came to send peace on earth." Nor, indeed, after the experience of eighteen centuries is it possible for anyone to think so.

All religious founders are of necessity and by the very nature of the case, not peacemakers but incendiaries. Whether they intend it or not, they of necessity set their respective adherents in deadly hostility to each other. Unlike other things, with rival religions there is no possible reconciliation; there is no possibility of even mutual recognition and mutual respect. Even toleration of each other is highly illogical, and can only be defended by their respective inabilities to act otherwise. Rivals in religion are like rivals in love; we can only give our soul to one claimant. Heaven's own toleration of false creeds which have at all times victimized the great bulk of our species is about the most curious and most melancholy problem the human mind can set itself to contemplate.

No, Reader, not peacemakers but peacebreakers have been all religious founders. And such even yet, though in a happily very attenuated way, they remain. For it is the nature of religious beliefs that they are all equally and utterly incapable either of verification or refutation. So long as they co-exist they must be hostile. And though in these happy days, religious discords, whether internal or those of system against system, are mere shadows of what they once were, they are in their nature and essence precisely what they have ever been.

Many amiable Christians have tried to persuade themselves, and allege they have succeeded, that the Prophet of Nazareth was, contrary to his express statement, a patron of peace, and adduce the amiability contained in this verse as proof. They seem to have reached this conclusion in the same way that other Christians

have arrived at the result that Jesus was a setter forth of the abstinence form of temperance ; that he was a lover and promulgator of civil and religious liberty ; and that he was a declarer and teacher of many other modern blessings which somehow his chief and other Churches were once so unfriendly to—which latter unhappy facts are now explained by their having misunderstood the meanings of Scripture. How easy it is to misunderstand Scripture must be admitted, as the varied antagonisms derived therefrom by Christians themselves only too plainly show us. But the ordinary human capacity to misunderstand, considerable as it is, needs much reinforcement in order to credit the Prophet of Nazareth with many of the good things often now ascribed to him.

The two blessings pronounced by Jesus in these verses may be taken together. For though to be persecuted for righteousness' sake and for his own sake are not necessarily the same thing, but may be entirely independent of each other and have very often been so, yet they are here obviously meant by Jesus as synonymous.

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

In these verses Jesus—we had written deals with, but feel compelled to substitute refers to—the terrible subject of religious persecution ; that black crime which has been so justly called the most dreadful evil man has inflicted on his fellow man. As persecution awaited all religious innovators in those days, Jesus could not help foreseeing the treatment in store for his disciples. An irrepressible question here forces itself upon us. Did Jesus foresee and know as he spoke these words that though his followers would at first be the victims of persecution yet that his own religion was destined to become the greatest engine of persecution that ever afflicted our race ? Did Jesus foresee that in his own name cruelties, frightful and long-continued, that make us shudder as we yet read of them, were to be inflicted, and inflicted eventually by his own followers upon each other ? Did Jesus here foresee that men were for ages to be led to the stake and the scaffold in his name as well as for his name ?

If, as Christians allege, Jesus knew all this, he must surely have felt a strange bitterness as he spoke of this most painful subject. And what, Reader, if this be so are we to think of the lamentable silence Jesus here preserved ? What are we to think of those few unspoken words which uttered would have averted all those black

crimes which have so copiously and indelibly stained the history of Christianity in our world? Who can help feeling regret that the short sentence forbidding persecution on his own behalf, seeing that Jesus at this moment knew what the withholding thereof was destined to produce, was left unspoken?

The power, which religionists attribute to their various Deities and which Trinitarian Christians ascribe to Jesus, of foreseeing the future is a compliment purchased at a terrible cost. For not all the subtleties that have been or may be proffered to men will persuade them that with a Being who has power to have the future what he wishes it to be, foreknowledge of the future does not mean both acquiescence in and responsibility for that future. We suppose Jesus deeply laments that the Inquisition was established. How easily he might have spared himself that well-founded regret!

Foresight of the future, and governance of the affairs of our race by heaven, are severe strains even upon the ostrich-like digestion of the varied and antagonistic pieties that ostensibly accomplish the feat. At the end of this Gospel Jesus declares that all power in heaven and in earth was given to him. It is not necessary here to inquire whether he had not previously possessed that same power. All we know is that the thousand years which followed that statement were a far worse and more ignoble period in human history than the thousand years that had preceded it.

The internal strifes and disruptions which have reduced the household of faith to a set of jarring sects are a sufficiently severe strain upon the theory of divine guidance of his own Church even by Jesus. But we doubt if to a humane Christian even that sorrowful problem is more trying than that Jesus should have permitted his followers to become cruel persecutors themselves.

Unhappily, problems like these thrust themselves upon human contemplation on every side. In the midst, for example, of the thousand years we have just named, following the acquisition of all power on earth by Jesus, he looked down upon our earth and beheld in the cradle of an Arab child an infant whom he knew was about to throw a false, degrading, fatal, and, alas enduring yoke upon thousands of millions of our race. A breath of disease would have extinguished that little life and with it the great and terrible religion it was otherwise about to found. But it was withheld, and the mournful consequences we know so well ensued.

The plea of inscrutability is the one usually proffered to us in

explanation, or rather in extenuation, of these melancholy illustrations of celestial wisdom and profundity. For ourselves we decline to accept or recognize it. But if it be accepted, the only deduction the human mind can make from it is that divine wisdom is entirely unsuitable for human imitation, and offers in many grave respects a very near approach to a model of what human beings themselves ought not to do.

The recompense declared by Jesus to await the victims of persecution for righteousness' sake and for his own sake is that of the kingdom of heaven, the same which he began by promising to the poor in spirit. We might naturally have expected in this case as in the others a special and distinct reward. It must, however, be owned that the kingdom of heaven and reward therein is amply sufficient to liberally repay being reviled, persecuted, and even martyred.

The nobility and grandeur of suffering for a good cause have been set forth by poets, orators, and writers in all ages. And the martyrs of every country who have died for liberty, for country, and for the right, are those whose memories are ever most cherished by men. But, unlike other martyrdoms, religious martyrdom is an extremely paying "sacrifice." It is a prodigiously profitable transaction in a strictly personal sense, as Jesus here points out. We doubt if even the threats against those who do not own them, in which religious founders indulge, are more humbling than the inflated and mercenary rewards and promises offered to those who accept them.

"Rejoice." We entirely fail to see any cause for rational rejoicing in the state of affairs here depicted. The whole of it is inexpressibly sad. Doubtless to the "victim" of persecution these deplorable proceedings as here set before us are extremely profitable; for his "persecutors" simply transfer him from earth to eternal bliss. And so regarded, Reader, what veritable and unedifying burlesques religious "martyrdoms" of all the many kinds are thus made to become. The "sufferings" that would otherwise stir our pity become a positive object of deserved derision when regarded as the known, deliberate, calculated purchase price of eternal bliss. Anything more utterly mercenary than "martyrdom" as thus depicted could not possibly be imagined.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

But in order to bring about this "rejoicing" on the part of these "sufferers" it is clearly necessary that the great majority of their fellow men around them should be blinded and misguided, filled indeed with religious zeal of their own,—for there can be no doubt that the zeal of persecutors is often, if not always, equal to that of martyrs,—but false zeal. Selfish indeed must be the martyr who can rejoice in such a state of affairs as is thus needed for his own personal gain. To be put to death needs putters to death. And however profitable such a fate may be to the sufferer, we fail to discern in such circumstances any decent or becoming ground for being "exceeding glad."

Does it not seem a pity, Reader, that the immediate adherents of the many religious founders who received the promise of a heaven for ill-usage on earth did not suggest to these founders how much better it would have been to have begun at the beginning by enlightening the minds of persecutors? How much better for these persecutors and the world would such a course have been! Nor would it have in the smallest degree interfered with the heaven awaiting these adherents themselves.

Religious heroism and religious sacrifice as here laid before us are indeed a most lucrative investment. One of the Christian Fathers tells us that in his time Christians were anxious for martyrdom. And instead of being ashamed of the sordid confession he is proud of it. Juggernaut-crushing is the same self-seeking in the mask of self-sacrifice whatever be its country and whatever be its creed.

Next-worldliness is indeed not only as selfish in its nature, but is far more purely selfish than this-worldliness. The latter is always admixed with some portion of thought and concern for others, but the former is pure, sheer selfishness from its beginning to its end. The mercenary self-seeking so often paraded before us as religious heroism and self-sacrifice deserves our scorn much more than our admiration.

"So persecuted they the prophets which were before you." In many cases this, no doubt, was the fact. But in others the lot of a prophet seems to have been a very pleasant and very enviable one. So, too, in our own day though the lot of some few Christian believers may possibly be a hard one, it is impossible to conceive a more pleasant and comfortable fate than that now enjoyed by the various professional successors of these "persecuted" disciples. It is a

life which is not only comfortable and remunerative—often extremely so—but which for its calm placidity and other enviable features is greatly preferable to most of the ordinary occupations of life.

In the version of this sermon furnished to us in the third Gospel we find that Jesus delivered a list of “Woes” immediately following his list of “Blesseds.” “Woe unto you that are rich for ye have received your consolation.” “Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger.” “Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep.” “Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you.”

Poverty is thus blessed, wealth is cursed. To hunger is better than to be filled. To weep is better than to laugh. To be despised by one’s fellow men is better than to be esteemed by them. It does not fall within the strict province of this work to consider the philosophy thus propounded to men as further set forth in the third Gospel. It may just be remarked that that philosophy did not even possess the small merit of novelty. The blessedness and the merit of poverty, penury, hardship, mourning, and opprobrium, were ancient ideas eighteen centuries ago.

Such, Reader, is the first section, and probably the favourite section of this sermon on the mount. And, according to Christian commentators, we ought to feel rapture, nay, ecstasy, as we recognize and think of the prodigious qualities and merits of these sayings. They are declared to contain unsearchable wisdom; depths pastsounding; to possess a beauty and a sublimity that are not measurable. It is declared that these dicta are not and could not be the produce of a human mind and of human lips; and that they are manifest and palpable utterances from heaven.

We do not begrudge one iota of the alleged amazing qualities of these sayings to anyone who can discern them therein. And he who can find good in them of any kind and degree does well to esteem and to praise them.

Our one duty in this work, Reader, is to record the plain and honest impression left upon us by a study of this gospel matter. Accordingly, we are here bound to state that we are totally unable to discern in these sayings of the Prophet of Nazareth a single one or even a vestige of a single one of the marvellous qualities thus ascribed to them. To us these sayings seem to be amiabilities of a very ordinary character; singularly wanting in any special impressiveness of any sort. Most of them are very excellent

sentiments, and when Jesus delivered them were as ancient as excellent.

To impugn what others revere must ever be an unpleasant and ungrateful task, and is usually stigmatized as presumptuous and as exhibitory of nothing but the deficiencies of those guilty of it. Be it so. In this case we are consoled and fortified by three considerations. Firstly, that sincerity, even if mistaken, is none the less a prime duty; secondly, that religious belief as shown in every creed suffuses a glamour over everything concerned in it, to the extent not only of making very plain things seem marvellous, but often even of making very ugly things seem beautiful; and thirdly, that believers in any given set and series of "celestial" utterances are the first to impugn and to deride any other alleged set and series.

Some little ambiguity seems to rest upon whom Jesus here

13 ¶ Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

addressed as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The opening verses of this chapter give one the impression that this sermon was spoken to "his disciples" only. The concluding verses which in a following chapter, bring this sermon—assuming it to be one continuous discourse—to an end, give the impression that it was spoken to the "people" and to a "multitude" who marvelled at what they had listened to. It seems impossible to regard this multitude as being the salt or the

light here referred to by Jesus; and we are compelled to think of these phrases as addressed to his more intimate and pronounced followers only.

It was the practice of all religious claimants to laud and, we are sorry to add, to flatter their immediate followers and adherents. They are declared to be chosen vessels, appointed instruments; bright and shining lights; and destined to be mighty potentates in the next world. The vanity of first adherents is appealed to and is fed in the most unqualified fashion. This is a most disagreeable feature. For whatever we may think of the various creed founders themselves their immediate adherents have, in every ascertainable instance, been not only most ordinary but even most meagre specimens of our species.

Christian commentators are careful to warn us that the light

here ascribed to these disciples is not an inherent but a derived light. Such a warning is not needed; for no reader of these Gospels can possibly fall into the mistake of thinking that the first followers of Jesus were self-luminous individuals. Whatever we may think of the light they shed upon the world it was clearly a reflected and borrowed one.

To the opinion that the men here addressed by Jesus were the salt of the earth and the light of the world we have no option, Reader, but to declare that we can yield no sort of concurrence. The dark ages, dreary and prolonged, which followed the light shed upon the world by these men are the best commentary upon such a view. It was only when apostle-light and church-light began to be doubted by men that better and true illumination began to stream on our world.

The question here propounded how salt which has lost savour shall be restored is left unanswered. What in man is the saline virtue, how got, how kept, and how lost, are also unexplained. Analysis and examinations of metaphors are not only useless, but are also at all times very unsafe. Hence it is better to leave the mental or spiritual state in man which corresponds to spent or unsavoured salt and also the treading under foot undeciphered.

The very evident facts here pointed out by Jesus, that salt which has lost its savour is good for nothing; that a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid; and that when men light a candle they do not put it under a bushel but on a candlestick, do not seem to yield any very marked instruction.

In this verse, however, Jesus proceeds to lay down a clear and definite principle and injunction. Men are bidden to let their light shine before others, to let their good works be seen; a principle which in and of itself is sensible and sound, but for which Jesus goes on to [assign an entirely transcendental reason.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

In the preceding verse Jesus showed that the reason why men placed a lighted candle on a candlestick was to give light to the people in the house. So also, whatever may be thought of the object here assigned by Jesus therefor, a very much nearer, plainer, simpler, and in itself quite sufficient reason exists why men who may possess light should let others see it, and why any good

works which are in the nature of an example and an encouragement should be shown to other men.

There need be no objection to the assigning purely religious considerations as a reinforcement of practices otherwise beneficial if the primary and natural grounds for the practices are recognized. But, as monasticism and so many other things show us, there is great and valid objection to purely religious considerations displacing and over-ruling natural ones.

How anything man can do can glorify God, and how, consequently, anything man can omit to do can lessen that glory seems a strange problem. It may be that the glorification here spoken of takes place solely in man's consciousness, and that God desires that result. The subject is a curious one, to which the Trinitarian view of Jesus adds a further peculiar aspect—that of Jesus seeking his own glory, a thing he elsewhere disclaims.

Jesus now removes an actual or a possible misapprehension as to the nature of his own mission. He assures his hearers they must not think he is come to destroy the law or to destroy the prophets; on the contrary, his object and purpose are to fulfil not destroy. His mission is not to destroy the *de facto* religion of his country but to fulfil, widen, and complete it.

How often has this been the first declaration and the first method of religious founders and reformers! Not to demolish an old faith but to purify, widen, and extend it is their primary allegation and claim. But old faiths do not relish this process; indeed resent it more acutely than they would resent a brand new faith. And we shall find that with Jesus, as with others, this declared adherence to the existing law and faith did not propitiate the religious authorities who bitterly resented what they regarded as, and declared to be, his blasphemous claims and innovations.

It is very difficult to make out the sense of this verse. "Till heaven and earth pass" is a phrase that yields no certain or even moderately certain meaning; and the declaration that "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled" yields, as commentaries show us, that distracting variety of meanings so characteristic of these Gospels.

The latter part of this verse is indeed a delicious piece of

17 ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

ambiguity. The most probable inference or rather surmise is that it asserts the strict inviolability of "the law" in its every detail and particle; and the continuance and permanence thereof until "all be fulfilled." The meaning of this latter eventuality is a subject of very clue-less conjecture.

It is very satisfactory to reflect that as a matter of fact, not only jots and tittles but large portions of "the law" have long since gone to a richly deserved oblivion. Large sections of the law are such that it would not now be possible to attempt their practice in civilized countries; an endeavour to effect that end would very righteously result to the endeavourer in social outlawry and even criminal process. Even in the time of Jesus the law, though nominally prevailing in its integrity in Judea, was largely in abeyance. The spirit of the age had caused even the Jews themselves to dilute and modernize their code; and we shall see from this narrative how in such a matter as the much-enjoined death penalty the Romans had happily greatly intercepted the working of the "divine" code. To Christians "the law" seems to be in a highly curious state of suspended animation; and the way in which some portions of it are declared to be still in force and others discarded, and the divergent opinions as to which class certain items belong, as also the various discriminating principles brought forward to determine this difficult and delicate perplexity, afford altogether a very diverting spectacle.

Were these two declarations reversed we could often more easily concur with them; as they stand we are obliged to demur to them altogether.

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever breaks and teaches men to break not only the "least," but also many of the greatest of the old Biblical laws and commandments is deserving of great praise; whilst anyone enjoining, much more practising, many of

them would well deserve and would assuredly now receive the detestation of his fellows.

And it is greatly to the honour of Jesus that with a delightful inconsistency—that characteristic inconsistency which on other subjects has produced the astonishing varieties, even flatly contradictory varieties, of Christian belief, Christian doctrine, and "Christianity" seen in the world to-day and which were seen in the very earliest times—he almost at once proceeds to countermand and

even reverse many of the "commandments" both little and great whose apparent sanctity is here upheld.

The statement that he who breaks and teaches the breaking of one of these least commandments shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven is a very tame conceit entirely unworthy of figuring in a serious moral discourse; and the gravity attempted to be imparted to it by some commentators in their interpretations only increases its original insipidity.

It needs the piercing vision and intuition of a born theologian,

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Reader, to perceive the bearing and the connection of many of the "fors," "therefores," "wherefores," and "because," found in these Gospels. The nexus between this strange verse and its predecessor is not very visible to an ordinary reader, though patent—indeed

what is there that is not patent?—to Christian commentators.

Never before was so singular a measure or standard of righteousness propounded as this here laid down. The general and average righteousness of two then well-known but now happily extinct bodies of men is here singled out, and the declaration made that such righteousness must be exceeded or entry into heaven will in "no case" be allowed.

The quantity and quality of the righteousness possessed by the scribes and the Pharisees are neither an inviting nor a profitable subject of investigation or speculation. They were peculiarly and especially religious bodies, and as such ought presumably to have been the cream of men. According to Jesus, however, they were the veritable scum of mankind. Though it is not safe to accept the portraiture of each other made by rival religionists—as the estimate of Jesus and his teaching by these same scribes and Pharisees shows us—it must be owned that not a few analogies to the state of things here described by Jesus might easily be found. The righteousness of priesthoods, monastics, and other specially religious bodies, both Christian and otherwise, instead of being conspicuous and manifest has only too often been conspicuously and painfully a very modest, and not seldom a quite minus, quantity.

This is the first mention by Jesus of two bodies of his countrymen with whom he was in constant and extremely bitter conflict. The remainder of this Gospel is so full—so tediously and wearisome

somely full—of these scribes and Pharisees that any further study of them may well be here deferred.

With this verse Jesus begins a series of countermandings of what had been “said” and commanded by “them of old time.” And in most cases these countermandings, as we shall see, are not mere cancellings or annulments but absolute reversals. The “But I say’s” here contrasted with what “was said by them of old time” are upon the whole very great improvements. This was not a very difficult task. Some of the substitutes offered by Jesus are very excellent; some are very doubtful and both need and receive much Christian trimming and adjusting; and some are deserving of strong dissent and protest.

The first of the commands of olden time dealt with by Jesus is the very elementary one against killing. The real ground why we ought not to kill each other is not referred to in what Jesus quotes, but simply the danger of being caught and punished for the act. It is not known where the latter portion of the last verse is quoted from.

It need hardly be said that this ancient command is not rescinded by Jesus; though it is regrettable to find the injunctions to “Slay and spare not” and to many very cruel forms of killing ascribed to Jesus, or at any rate to Jehovah, in the Old Testament. The object of Jesus in dealing with this ancient commandment is apparently to amplify it, and to get down to the root of the matter by pointing out the nature of anger. How far what follows is successful in this latter purpose must be left to the judgment of each reader.

Jesus first adverts to the case of a man who is angry with his brother without a cause. The difficulty of ascertaining what Jesus meant by this is enhanced—as is so often the case—by doubts as to the authenticity of the text as here given. Whether the doubtful words “without a cause” be retained or omitted a difficulty remains. A person’s being angry with his brother without a cause is, of course, as unintelligible as any other effect without a cause. Hence, some think that by “a cause” is meant a just, valid, or sufficient cause. On the other hand, if the phrase “without a cause” be left out altogether, being angry with a brother at all is obviously condemned. Indignation and resentment are, however, amongst our most natural, and in due measure, and upon just occasion, most righteous

21 ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

feelings ; and in the sequel of this Gospel we shall find them abundantly exhibited both in word and in deed by Jesus himself. The import of "in danger of the judgment" in this connection is somewhat obscure. It can scarcely have the meaning of the same phrase in the last verse.

Passing on, Jesus adds that anyone terming his brother *Raca*—a local term of contempt—shall be in danger of the council, and that anyone saying "Thou fool" shall be in danger of hell fire. The relative enormity of being angry with a brother without cause, of calling him *Raca*, and terming him a fool must be left to those willing to study the problem. It is one best left to join the obscurity of the local allusions here used to exemplify it.

In this paragraph Jesus offers a bit of very practical advice.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

The outward form it takes is more especially adapted to Jewish institutions ; but may probably be applied to the varied Christian arrangements which have taken the place of the old Israelitish altar and mode of bringing gifts and offerings thereto.

The recommendation of Jesus is that on approaching the altar with a gift and calling to mind "that thy brother hath ought against thee," the bearer is to leave his gift at the altar and go his way ; "first be reconciled to thy brother," adds Jesus, and "then come and offer thy gift."

To remove misunderstandings and animosities is obviously at all times desirable. But whilst nothing is easier than to say "First be reconciled to thy brother," alas ! few things are generally more difficult to accomplish. If indeed, as the form given to the supposition by Jesus nominally implies, the bearer of this altar gift is a conscious offender against his brother, then to go and make amends is a manifest duty. But alienations, and especially brothers' alienations, are rarely of this simple order. In human antagonisms and misunderstandings, men may feel themselves wholly in the right, mainly in the right, or partly so ; the second of these states of consciousness being the one undoubtedly felt in the great bulk of alienations and differences of all kinds. Sheer, pure transgression no doubt exists also ; but except with the coarsest natures is a very rare state of things.

In the case of a conscious offender it is to be hoped the visit of reconciliation and repentance may succeed ; that forgiveness, and as far as may be possible, the restoration of esteem may be

accorded; and the return to the altar and consummation of the offering effected. How far a visit to an alienated brother who "hath ought against thee," when one's own consciousness is wholly, chiefly, or partially, one of rectitude, may be proper or wise is a very difficult problem. How far such a visit if undertaken is likely to end in a satisfactory reconciliation is also a further perplexing problem. The truth is that the real difficulty begins where sayings like "First be reconciled to thy brother," and other amiable maxims of the kind, end. And what if the attempt at reconciliation fails? Is the gift to continue at the altar unoffered?

Bearing on this subject we find that further on in this Gospel Jesus on one occasion lays down some specific rules for dealing with an offending brother. But after enumerating two or three plans, it is melancholy to find that Jesus was obliged to conclude with the very mundane injunction in case of non-success, to "Let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican."

How to convert these extraordinary verses into good sense, or even into an approach to the humbler quality known by the name of common sense, is the task Christian expositors here set themselves. The variety of expedients by which this desirable end is sought to be attained, at least does credit to the fertility of resource possessed by those pious and learned men.

It is and must be owned that these verses as we here find them are not very promising material for conversion into bright and shining wisdom. As they here stand they have, apart from their other aspects, a most unpleasant resemblance to an appeal to mere cowardice, and to a craven fear of an adversary. No one will deny that agreement with an adversary is a very desirable object. But it is an object that is desirable and to be sought only subject to one vital condition; and that is, that the adversary in question can be honourably agreed with. If the adversary in question will not and cannot honourably be agreed with, then any agreement is a gross and shameful abandonment of plain duty. We much regret to say that the sinister maxim, "Resist not evil," Jesus lays down a little further on, compels us to take these verses in their natural unsophisticated sense, and to refuse the various qualifying "exeges" Christian commentators suggest to us.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

"Agree!" Certainly; but on what terms? On any terms? The only condition added to this categorical command is that of "quickly": a condition that adds a very ludicrous flavour to this otherwise sufficiently unheroic exhortation.

Prisons, Reader, are not very desirable places to be sent to; men do not intend them to be so when they are driven to build them. But there are worse things than going to prison. And amongst them is an agreement with some kinds of adversaries.

The next subject with which Jesus deals is the greatest and gravest

27 ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

of human problems, that of sex-relationship. The particular form of that relationship here adverted to has reference to marriage and

to the very odious breach of it by the crime of adultery.

Adultery, taken in all its bearings, is probably the worst form and species of human wrong doing. In all its forms it is a foul act; and in its most aggravated shape—where a married woman is one of the guilty ones—it is both on her own part and on that of her co-adulterer, an act whose baseness is unsurpassable. Such a woman brings to her husband a child not his; whilst the adulterous father of such child is not only willing to abandon all the duties of fatherhood, and shirk all the claims a child has upon its originator, but is also willing to palm those duties upon another with every circumstance of the most hateful kind surrounding the act. It is little to be wondered that the poisoned cup so often consummates such a train of perfidy.

The indiscretions and misconduct which may take place between unmarried persons are doubtless deeply to be regretted. But they are at any rate above board and have none of the worst features inherent in adultery. Well, Reader, may men surround the institution of marriage—though its own inherent merits make it little need them—with every sanction and sanctity, religious, sentimental, and social that can be imparted to it.

It is a matter to us of deep regret that the object of this work compels us to state that the contents of the first chapter of this Gospel constitute in our humble judgment, as they have done in the judgment of so many others, one of the gravest arraignments of the Christian "scheme."

A most excellent saying. One of the best and deepest things

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after

to be found in this Gospel or elsewhere. Jesus here verily goes to the root of the sin of

her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

adultery, and by parity of reasoning, of all other sins also. For one sin committed in fact,

how many are committed in heart but not carried out! The value of this deep and sagacious saying is that it points out the stage where an evil propensity should be, and best can be, dealt with; the stage at which it is most easily mastered and vanquished. Yet, Reader, justice compels us to add that this excellent piece of divine wisdom had actually been already discovered and laid down by mere human minds, as a reference to several ancient moralists shows us.

Pursuing his subject, Jesus goes on to lay down a principle deserving of the strongest dissent and disapprobation. Of the coarse imagery here used by Jesus it is sufficient to say that it is in keeping with and worthy of the proposition it is made use of to set forth. Some doubt, however, may well be felt, whether the plucking of eyes and chopping of hands are meant to be altogether figurative. For, further on, Jesus tells us of those who, in accordance with the philosophy here laid down, had "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake."

The philosophy here set before us is to the effect that our best powers—typified by our right hand and right eye—are to be deliberately destroyed if they are felt to offend us or be a temptation to us. And it is obvious that in accordance with this principle the remaining eye and remaining hand must follow suit also in like circumstances.

Indeed, this method of escaping offences and temptations, is a very far-reaching one; for other members of our frame, especially the tongue and the one alluded to by Jesus in the quotation we have just made, are very likely to call for the treatment here recommended. Our own impression is that a complete application of this method in the shape of liberating our noble souls from our ignoble bodies altogether is the logical end of the principle now before us.

It is not necessary to discuss at length this curious specimen of celestial wisdom. The underlying idea of it is indeed obvious enough, and it may be added, was then ancient enough; and it has been exemplified in every conceivable variety of way by the hermits, fakirs and ascetics of all times and all creeds. It is manifest, for

example, that ill-health will preserve us from many temptations to which good-health exposes us, and that blindness will keep us out of many occasions of stumbling that sight brings before us. This is a very mixed world, in which absolute concrete good and evil are probably nowhere to be found. But that right hands and right eyes and good powers of all kind are to be destroyed that the temptation they may lead us into may be escaped, is a principle not worthy of contemplation. Not to mention its other aspects, it is a piece of ignominious poltroonery.

But the argument with which Jesus reinforces his reasoning is even more astonishing than the exhorted plucking of eyes and cutting off of hands themselves. "For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell," an argument which Jesus repeats to his hearers a second time.

The Christian hell certainly seems, from Jesus' own description of it, to be a place of such a kind that it would be more "profitable" for us that not one but all our members should "perish" rather than that any single one of them find its way thither. And if the sacrifice or perishing of "one of thy members" be the means of getting the remainder into heaven it is obviously a very "profitable" loss. Ah, well, Reader, Jesus is not the only one who has appealed to the hell-argument in support of poor reasoning. It is a very humiliating resource, but how else is so much of the various celestial wisdoms to sufficiently impress us?

A very singular incidental feature of one of the next worlds is here made known. Those who are destined—alas, how few are not—to take their places in the Christian hell, take their bodies with them. It would almost seem, however, that a lost limb or other member "perishes," and thus as it seems natural to infer, escapes the dreadful fate of the remainder of the body. Whether the converse holds in the case of those who go to heaven minus a limb—for loss of eyes and limbs, like everything else, happens in our world to the elect as well as to the wicked—is not disclosed but certainly seems probable.

The laws and customs of the Jews touching marriage and sex-relationship were about the most lax and most depraved that ever existed amongst a civilized people. The Old Testament is upon this subject the most nauseous volume in existence.

31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

And instead of being better than the common people, the noted men amongst the Jews, "the men of God," were the worst offenders on this score. We read how they possessed numerous wives; concubines *ad libitum*; how they "went in" to their wives' maids, and behaved themselves in the most flagrant and loathsome fashion generally. When we reflect upon the provisions of the divine code upon this matter, one particular gem of which Jesus here quotes, we need not be surprised at the picture of Jewish manners to which we have just referred.

No doubt in the time of Jesus the usages of the Jews in this matter had become more practically decent and becoming, owing to the time-spirit, and to the better examples and influence of other nations. But Jewish theories upon the whole subject were still of the lowest order.

The Mosaic regulation he here quotes, Jesus elsewhere declares was a precept given to accommodate itself to the hardness of men's hearts. As Jesus, according to theologians, was the real author and sanctioner of the divine code given by Moses, it is obvious that his declaration on this point must be accepted as authentic. The Mosaic code, however, was a lamentably "accommodating" one in other respects, as its regulations regarding polygamy, slavery, and other things plainly show. Alas, Reader, many of the positive and cruel injunctions of that code would lead us to the conclusion that they were not so much an accommodation to men's hardnesses as an incitement and instigation thereto.

Jesus' entire references to this momentous subject of sex-relationship are of the slightest, and are confined to this one point of adultery and divorce. It is very noticeable that man's side of the question is the only one considered, woman being dealt with as a passive subject—her feelings and her rights not extorting a mention even.

In contradistinction to the precept just quoted, Jesus proceeds to lay down his own regulation concerning divorce, which we presume is intended as a final and permanent deliverance upon the subject, though it must be owned that the temporary sanction he had accorded to the injunction here rescinded is not calculated to make us feel very confident on the point.

The only valid cause allowed by Jesus for the putting away a

32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

wife—and though not stated, presumably a husband also—is that of fornication. As in another chapter Jesus repeats this statement with some slight additional references, we defer our observations thereto.

Upon the last clause of this verse there exists, and very naturally exists, a very sharp division of Christian opinion. Whether it is lawful to marry a divorced woman at all is a question this clause leaves in characteristic ambiguity. It is certainly singular that a divine law should resemble some human ones in the defect of being of doubtful import. But when we think of the doubts left by gospel utterances upon fundamental problems in theology even, we need not be surprised to find a mere practical question of human duty left in uncertainty, to be solved, like theological enigmas, as best we can.

Descending from great things to small ones, Jesus, in the paragraph comprised in this and the four following verses, goes on to deal with the subject of oaths; and the excellent declarations he gave to his hearers thereupon are deserving of the warmest praise.

33 ¶ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

Oaths, vows, imprecations, curses and all like puerile customs are the characteristics and the produce of a rudimentary state of human society. The endless ways in which men have sought to artificially impart an additional or supposed additional obligation to speak the truth form a curious study, often amusing, but often also painful. And few things better illustrate the hardy nature of superstitions than the way in which oath-taking still lingers amongst mankind. For it is still well-nigh universal; from the Chinaman who reinforces his testimony by breaking in pieces a pot and expressing his wish to be broken in like fashion if he speak not the truth, to us Westerns who accomplish the same object by kissing a greasy sixpenny book. There is, however, as regards ourselves, much reason to suppose that the latter formula derives its chief if not entire potency from the very proper and well-known punishment for false testimony which reinforces it.

When men are taught that they are under a greater and deeper obligation to speak the truth after going through a given formula, be it what it may, than they are before going through it, it follows that they must be under a less obligation to speak truth without that form than with it—a fictitious distinction which is as mis-

chievous as it is foolish. Whatever added efficacy an oath may possibly impart in individual cases, the general influence of oaths is unquestionably to impair the general standard of truthfulness amongst mankind. Hence the small body of Christians who have honourably carried out their Master's commands on this subject are a body whose simple "Yea" and "Nay" stand and have ever stood deservedly and peculiarly high in men's esteem and trust.

Few things are more regrettable than to observe the way in which many Christian commentators attempt to pare and trim this clear and decisive injunction by trying to show us that "not at all" simply means, not in some ways. But perhaps this is merely due to force of habit.

"But I say unto you, Swear not at all." If this be not an absolute prohibition then language cannot convey one; and gospel meanings become a mirage whose pursuit is mere vanity.

After thus prohibiting swearing of any and every kind, Jesus goes on to enumerate several forms of oath which it is presumable were then specially current and popular. The particular oaths here named by Jesus are neither better nor worse than such formulæ usually are. They are hardly worth the special mention with which Jesus honours them, nor, we are bound to add, are the reasons he urges against each particularly striking.

The oaths here singled out for mention and condemnation are four in number. Men are not to swear by heaven, because it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great king; nor by their own heads, because they cannot make one hair white or black.

34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

The first of these four objects, to anyone who wishes to swear at all, certainly seems as suitable as anything that can be suggested. It sounds well, and that counts for a good deal in such things. Hence to swear "by heaven," and calling on heaven to witness, are still the favourite forms in use by those who feel their plain asseveration needs some little strengthening. And it is curious that even this emphatic condemnation of their Master has not banished this particular form from even Christian usage. Later on in this Gospel we shall find the chief priest propounding to Jesus an

extreme form of this very oath, adjuring him, not by the throne of God, but even by the very occupant thereof.

The second of these condemned oaths is that of swearing by our own earth, which certainly seems an eminently unsuitable object for the purpose. The earth is doubtless a very tangible thing, and it must be owned we know a great deal more about it than we do of heaven. But it is far too mixed a body; and is also, in the Prince of this world, under the jurisdiction of an authority who, as the prime originator of lies, is glaringly unfitted to have anything to do with corroborating truth.

The reason, however, assigned by Jesus against swearing by our own earth is that "it is God's footstool." The information here incidentally given us that our little planet is Jehovah's footstool is one of the remarkably few definite pieces of knowledge on such subjects that Jesus favoured us with. And even the Prophet Isaiah had already apprised us of this fact.

It certainly seems at first somewhat doubtful whether we ought to regard the curious fact thus disclosed or confirmed as a compliment or as an expression of contempt. For our own part, Reader, we accept it as a piece of contemptuous scorn; ill according, however, with the preposterous importance accorded to our pigmy globe and its affairs on other occasions; and certainly not very conducive or flattering to the dignity of Jesus' own mission to the footstool in question.

The notions and beliefs concerning our tiny globe and the heavenly bodies which prevailed in the time of Jesus—and which, if not shared by him, he dismally, as with other ignorances, accommodated himself to—rendered the fancy of our earth being God's footstool a passable conceit; for our planet was then thought to be the great centre of the universe to which the sun and stars were diminutive accessories and subordinates. But Astronomy has revealed the fact that our small orb is not even the principal body in its own relatively small cluster; and by further showing that it whirls round the sun, and even around itself, has made sad havoc with the simile of a footstool. It is impossible to think of a globular revolving footstool with any tolerable degree of decorum.

The third form of oath censured by Jesus is that of swearing by Jerusalem. As a local custom this oath was perhaps a natural and intelligible one. It was not one likely to be used by any but the Jews; and how extremely unsuitable for the purpose of

imparting sanctity or reliability to an oath, or indeed to anything else, the Jewish metropolis really was, is lamentably shown in the terrible woes and destruction declared by Jesus a little later on to be then impending over it for its sins and its insensibility to the new evangel.

The reason given by Jesus against using Jerusalem for this purpose, however, is not its sinfulness nor its callousness to himself, but because "it is the city of the great king." As Jerusalem is palpably no longer "the city of the great king;" as it was even then on the point of exchanging the divine favour for the divine vengeance, and is now given over to the dominion of a great false prophet, there can be no impropriety in expressing a candid opinion concerning this famous whilom city of the great king.

The city of the great king was not a great city. In the time of Jesus its dimensions were those of what would now be considered a second or third rate town. Nor can we think of any other sense of the word great which could truthfully be applied to Jerusalem. There is no spot, Reader, that we should have more difficulty in cultivating any attachment to or feeling any tender sentiment for than the city of the great king. Nor is there any city that less deserves the thanks or gratitude of mankind.

Jerusalem was a most unfortunate city. It had been taken and pillaged five or six times before Titus took it. And it has been taken about an equal number of times since by the Christians and the Saracens. The divine favour Jerusalem once enjoyed, and the divine antipathy it afterwards incurred, seem to have been very much alike to it in this respect.

The selection of Jerusalem as the favourite city of our Creator, is amongst the array of inscrutable religious problems; for certainly no reasons therefor present themselves to human contemplation. This, however, is but a part of the still greater mystery that when our Creator decided to become a man and became a Jew, he identified himself with Jewish thoughts, Jewish beliefs, and—we much regret to have to add—even Jewish prejudices, as a well-known opprobrious designation he once applied to non-Jews, and many other things, very clearly show us.

The fourth oath censured by Jesus is that of swearing by one's own head. We may surely here indulge in a smile, Reader. We have been gradually descending from heaven to earth, and to

Jerusalem, and have at last got down to the individual headpiece of ourselves, or of a fellow mortal. There is, however, after letting our thoughts dwell, or seek to dwell, on mighty things, a relaxation and a pleasure in coming down to humble objects.

There is undoubtedly this to be said in favour of swearing by one's own head, that it is an object always held in high esteem. At the same time this process is a manifest piece of tautology. And when the head in question is that of a man about to forswear himself, the proceeding has a highly ludicrous aspect.

The reason given against this singular kind of oath by Jesus is the inability of the swearer to make one hair white or black. Our only remark upon this argument is that it is quite as good a refutation as the case merited.

In this wise sentence Jesus sums up this whole matter. Simple and plain affirmation is all that is needed, and should be sought, in human speech. Even if it be true that oaths or other devices to extort the truth be effectual with certain natures, it is an expedient that, even with such natures, is ultimately prejudicial to the general interests of truth itself. More than Yea and Nay not only cometh of evil, but also leadeth to it.

37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

And here all readers of this Gospel may well warmly recognize the noble disregard of what might have been taught by "them of old time" which Jesus here and elsewhere enjoins. To give to any "it hath been said" any greater honour and value than the intrinsic merit and wisdom of the saying may entitle it, is the sure and certain road to mental servility, to intellectual and social stagnation, and to paralysis of all man's best powers.

A reasonable reverence of and even tenderness for antiquity, a real but rational respect for the wisdom of those who have lived before us, are desirable in and due from all men; and no character is either lovable or trustworthy in which these feelings are wanting or are inadequate. But when these feelings are in excess they are the most efficient and complete—not excepting even selfish vested interests—of all thwarters of human progress. "It hath been said," especially if clothed in sacred or semi-sacred garb, is, alas, still a sufficient and effectual reason with all the backward and non-progressive portions of mankind; and the fact has been the main cause of their being so. What should be living powers and forces become fossilized by excessive and unworthy deference

to the "hath been saids" of the past. Let us hope posterity may respect our own wisdom; but let us also hope they may greatly improve upon it.

Supposing this sermon, as here given, to be a continuous discourse and not a mere collection of our author's, it is very observable that there is little or no classification in it. Jesus passes from one subject to quite another, and then to another still, again repassing to one previously dealt with, or at least to something cognate and kindred thereto. It is not by way of complaint we say this, Reader; indeed, we quite acknowledge that this sermon would not have looked as picturesque had it been arranged in strict sections. At the same time the qualities of classification, clear definition, and arrangement, which distinguish the Western from the Eastern mind, are, to our thinking, so desirable and so precious; they have conduced so much more than almost any others to all forms of human progress, that we cannot regard the blending and mixing of subjects in this sermon as either a real merit or in any way a precedent to be followed.

If these hearers of Jesus were students of, or frequent listeners to, the Jewish Scriptures, the phrase "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," must have been an exceptionally familiar one to them from the number of times the phrase and variations upon it occur in the divine writings.

The *lex talionis*—the idea of measure for measure, of strict and exact repayment in kind, that what a man sows he shall reap—is undoubtedly the original and elementary idea of human justice. Such an exact and precise recompense feels to be that very restoration of an equilibrium and balancing of scales which are the most familiar conceptions of the realization of justice. It is, however, manifest that literal carryings out of this process are usually impracticable and often quite impossible; hence artificial forms of retribution have to be substituted. None the less these artificial substitutes are based upon the conception of precise reparation; though not punishments in kind, they are in theory at least equivalents, exactly proportioned to the offence itself.

For this principle Jesus substitutes another which is certainly the most fantastical and anarchical ever propounded. A man who receives an injury is not to return it; he is not to resent it; he is

not to seek redress. He is to submit to it, and to court even a repetition of it.

“Resist not evil.” The worst maxim ever proclaimed. The very worst advice ever offered to men. To resist evil is the greatest and supremest duty of every human being. Every thing that is good, every thing that is great and noble in our human lives consists in the manful resisting of evil and struggling for the good.

39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

In support and in illustration of this craven maxim, Jesus gives three specific and practical methods in which it is to be exemplified and carried out by his hearers. If smitten on the one cheek—“whosoever” be the smiter—the other cheek is to be “turned” to him also. If any of these hearers be sued at law by “any man,” and his coat be taken, “let him have thy cloak also,” says Jesus. And if one of these hearers be compelled, “whosoever” may be the compeller, to go a mile, Jesus recommends such hearer to go a second mile. In short, evil and evil-doers are not to be resisted, but to be submitted to. Wrong and wrong-doing are not to be grappled and struggled with; on the contrary, submission thereto, absolute and unqualified, conscious and deliberate, is the “moral” teaching here proffered to men by Jesus.

Happily, Reader, this teaching has been tendered to men in vain, as the many glorious and successful struggles for liberty and for justice which have since ennobled history and blessed the world plainly show us. Not in some only, but in every one of its aspects, the teaching here enunciated by Jesus is as unsound as it is servile.

Now what is the ground and underlying purpose of this strange doctrine, a doctrine of which the Prophet of Nazareth was by no means the first proclaimer? It is the vapid and groundless notion that in voluntary submission to wrong and to injustice there is a certain subjective merit, a holy humility, an angelic magnanimity; that by such a line of conduct a man, though outwardly making himself a pusillanimous croucher, in reality makes himself a saint.

How human beings can distort even their best feelings and bring themselves to admire strange and perverted things, history only too abundantly bears witness. But even the spectacle of a miserable heavenly-pleasure-seeker throwing himself beneath the wheels of a Juggernaut in the rôle of a martyr—though it excites

the rapturous admiration of thousands as a magnificent example of self-immolation and self-abnegation—is not a more pitiful sight than that of an otherwise sensible man submitting himself to undeserved and resistible contumely, and trying to persuade himself he is doing a fine and a meritorious thing.

Whether in its individual and subjective or in its social aspect, willing submission to resistible wrong is a counterfeit virtue; a counterfeit of that noble and heroic bearing of unavoidable or unsuccessfully resisted calamity which men ever and so justly admire.

It is sometimes contended that such a method of yielding to evil and submitting to wrong-doers is likely to favourably affect the latter. The saintly meekness and humility thus exhibited must, it is said, touch and soften even evil-doers. Such a deduction is utterly fallacious. The plain lesson of all history and experience is that yielding to wrong-doing encourages wrong-doers, and makes them become entirely callous to their misdeeds. The old Inquisitors got harder and more unfeeling as they got more and more practice; torturers and thumb-screwers were not touched by the meek sufferings of their victims, but were confirmed in their own barbarity and self-assurance by the apparent acquiescence and submission of those victims. Even in ordinary life those who are willing to try the plan of surrender to and agreeing quickly with an adversary in the hope of thereby “melting” him, will find the plan a failure in all its consequences, immediate and ultimate.

But there is an altogether higher aspect of this question. If we feel ourselves in the right, then to submit to wrong-doers, to acquiesce in their demands, and to agree quickly with our adversary is to surrender right to wrong, and to yield up truth to falsehood.

Not to submit to injustice of any kind, but to meet it with a firm resistance and a bold front at its first appearance, is alike the true, the wise, and the merciful course. The doctrine here laid down by Jesus is as destitute of true beauty as it is of good sense. In its social aspect it is sheer anarchism.

It is scarcely necessary to dwell upon these detailed and specific methods of exemplifying his maxim Jesus here enjoins. As regards the first of them given in the preceding verse, it may be observed that even those who profess to admire a calm

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also.

receipt of a first blow on the cheek seem to have many qualms in

admiring the injunction to "turn" the other for a like indentation. It also seems natural to infer, in accordance with this theory, that a third blow must also be placidly endured or sought, and even—if such be the smiter's good pleasure—death itself quietly submitted to; for it is impossible to see at what point in this non-resisting theory—where and why—resistance would become proper.

The specific illustration of his theory enjoined by Jesus in the present verse is a highly ludicrous one. When a Christian is sued at law, and as a natural consequence of his non-appearance judgment given against him and a distraint levied upon his coat, he is to let the suer have his cloak in addition. Does not the picture of this noble hero, this suffering saint, thus holding out his cloak to the rapacious taker of his coat move our very heart strings? Well, Reader, for ourselves we can but reply that the only feeling such a conception stirs in us is that of resentment at the travesty of a genuine virtue thus presented to us. If it had been the object of Jesus to satirize and pour derision on his own maxim it is difficult to see how he could better have done so.

It is eminently satisfactory to find that Christians honour this command, as they justly honour so many other gospel exhortations, in the breach and not in the observance. In spite of this explicit command of their master, and the further odious recommendation of Paul to suffer themselves to be defrauded, it is pleasing to find Christians not only as defendants resisting those who sue them at law, but also discharging their duty to themselves and to society by becoming plaintiffs and suers against wrong-doers.

The third practical illustration of his teaching enjoined by Jesus is that of going an additional mile, when called upon to go a first—an illustration understood to refer to certain humble services in connection with military matters which the Romans exacted from the Jews. This third method of exemplifying his maxim exhorted by Jesus, has happily become obsolete and incapable of application. Modern society affords us no opportunity of carrying out this injunction after we have ceased to be schoolboys.

Not so, however, with the exhortation found in this verse, which we have still abundant opportunities of carrying into effect. Beggars and borrowers are still with us, and as willing as their predecessors to be obliged with a dole or a loan.

41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

It may first be observed that the two virtues, or supposed virtues—for the modern estimate of the real value and utility of the two processes here inculcated is, and justly, but a very moderate one—named in this verse, especially if practised after the manner of the verse itself without any qualification, are very exhausting ones. The practice of these amiable, or what appear to be amiable, exhortations would be a severe drain upon resources; for no reputation spreads faster than that of easy generosity. And nothing better illustrates the great law of conservation of energy than this same article of money or money's worth. The obliging of beggars and borrowers obviously renders the amount so employed incapable of use in better and worthier ways. For speaking generally, the two ways of using money or goods here recommended are about the very worst in which they can be used, as all thinkers of repute on the subject have agreed, and as any one who will take the trouble to trace out consequences will find.

“Give to him that asketh thee.” Here of course as elsewhere, Christian commentators step in and tell us what Jesus really meant, but did not exactly say. That is, these pious men trim and adjust their Master's sayings until they become dismal platitudes, and we no longer recognize them as anything Jesus himself ever said. The liberty taken with the sacred text by what is usually known as orthodox Christianity, is indeed amazing; the freedoms used with what are professed to be divine commands, are often simply startling.

Taking this verse as Jesus gave it and without the glosses of his expositors, it is not good advice, Reader. It is advice which is neither good in its consequences, nor good in its animating motive. Admirable as kindly feeling and a disposition to help each other always are, easy going charity and ready disbursement are in no sense to be admired. Charity of such a type is in reality a subtle form of self-indulgence. The standing condemnation of easy alms is that the process, without the trouble of inquiry, is in reality the indulgence of a sentimental pleasure to the giver, regardless of the well-known ill consequences of the practice. The notion that there is a subjective merit in the mere feeling and exercise of the charitable impulse, irrespective of the worth or worthlessness of the recipient is a very contemptible one and cannot be denounced too strongly.

Whatever be the merit and the pleasure of alms-giving, the receipt thereof is, to all but the worthless, more or less painful. Well have the recipients of charity been termed the victims of benevolence. The painfulness of alms-receiving increases *pari passu* with the worth of the recipient, until with the better and finer natures it is all but unbearable. That the best are the last to ask, is the best commentary on the easy injunction, "Give to him that asketh thee."

How to make all the painful forms of charity unneeded is the noble object good men are everywhere seeking to achieve; and happily, with great, if but slow and gradual success. The hideous existing injustices of human society are the main cause of alms being needed from man to man. And it would be far better if those of us who have the means to indulge in the luxury of benevolence, and do so indulge ourselves, would set ourselves to the far nobler task of achieving social righteousness; an end which would indeed deprive us of the luxury we have named, but which would spare our wronged fellow men the corresponding pain of receiving our gifts. Until the hoped-for day when that noble purpose shall have been attained, it may be that alms from man to man will still be needed. But indiscriminate gifts will neither hasten that coming time, nor even soften the period that may yet intervene.

Of the virtue of lending, little need be said. It may be doubted whether the race of borrowers or of beggars enjoys and deserves the worse reputation. Sorrowful experience has with most men shown that borrowing is but a more artistic and genteel mode of begging, and as far as the lender is concerned, it is accompanied with none of those soothing, complacent emotions outright giving usually produces.

From a borrower, Jesus tells us, we are not to turn away. If by this be meant that we are to listen to the loan-seeker, and give ourselves the trouble to investigate his case afterwards, the advice may be regarded as sensible and wise; but if turn not away means uninquiring compliance, worse advice could not be suggested.

The version of this command found in the third Gospel is, "Give to every man that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again."

The latter of the two commands here apparently "quoted" by Jesus offers a considerable difficulty. Who gave the command to "hate thine enemy" here named by Jesus, and where it is to be found, are not known. We are far from sure that hating enemies has never been enjoined. Such strange things have been taught in our world in the name of religion, that the inculcation of such a maxim would not be surprising. But it is to the honour of the Jewish code that whilst the first of these commands is found therein, the second is not. The frightful cruelties, indeed exterminations, enjoined by Jehovah to be practised upon their enemies by the Jews are, however, a melancholy practical exemplification of this latter maxim. To oppose enemies and fight against them has often been imperative upon men both before and since Jesus' time. But there is in all human nature, except the very worst and poorest, a feeling of honour and of chivalry even to enemies.

Whoever it may have been who enjoined men to hate their enemies, Jesus proceeds to rebuke the injunction and to proclaim its exact opposite. In place of hating their enemies Jesus bade his hearers love them.

We have, Reader, just felt it our duty to pronounce a maxim laid down by Jesus to be the worst in existence. Pleasing indeed, welcome indeed, is here our duty, and most willingly and cheerfully do we fulfil it by declaring our belief that the maxim published by Jesus in the verse now before us is the best and finest in existence. "Love your enemies." All honour to that noble exhortation!

The possibility of loving enemies has been much impugned. It has been declared not to be in human nature nor in the nature of things, a contradiction in terms; and that any professions to have accomplished it are unreal and a mere playing with words. No doubt there are enemies and enemies, and loving is a sufficiently elastic term to allow of endless degrees therein. But for ourselves we entirely believe in the possibility of entertaining a real and fundamental affection and goodwill to enemies.

To be just to our enemies is a course which for all useful purposes is probably the best to set before ourselves. For it must be owned that some of the quixotic attempts which have been made to carry

43 ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

out this maxim of Jesus, by the bending to and the coaxing and fondling of enemies, are as objectionable as they are undignified ; and certainly had no sort of precedent in Jesus' own example to his own enemies.

The primary thing is to seek to understand our enemies ; to try to ascertain what leads them to be such. And if a fair and honest examination of their attitude and of our own leads us to the conviction of our own rectitude, then it is undoubtedly our bounden duty to remain opponents if not enemies. None the less do we believe that it is at the same time possible to entertain an underlying kindness and goodwill towards them.

The amplifications of his maxim Jesus goes on to add do not afford much further light or guidance of a practical kind. To bless them that curse us may possibly be considered a very fine frame of mind, and it may be hoped that such an attitude may duly soften some sorts of cursers at least. We have to own that our own admiration for such a frame of mind, and our faith in its efficacy upon cursers, are both limited.

To do good to those who hate us needs to be regulated by many practical considerations of tact and of good sense, or the attempt will degenerate into behaviour at once fantastic and worse than useless.

To pray for those who ill-use and persecute us—except so far as it may conduce to what may be thought a desirable frame of mind subjectively—obviously depends for its efficacy upon whether it may please the heavenly authorities thus prayed to, to give the desired result in the quarter where it is needed.

The personal illustrations of the amiable maxims of this verse offered to us by Jesus himself, are duly set before us in the sequel of this gospel narrative. And melancholy illustrations they are, Reader.

Jesus himself had, of course—according to the Christian hypothesis—no justifiable enemies ; he had never wronged anyone in omission or commission ; he had no aversions, and in all differences with others was absolutely in the right. This hypothesis we shall not here traverse ; though our not doing so must not be taken for concurrence.

But Jesus had enemies ; and—we will word it as mildly as we honestly can—he spoke of them and to them, he treated them, and above all threatens to treat them, in a way that throws a painful light on the creamy amiabilities now before us.

If Jesus loved his enemies he very curiously dissembled the feeling by constantly accosting them in terms of extreme bitterness and antipathy; terms which seem chosen not to soften men but to goad them. He may possibly have prayed for the scribes and the Pharisees. We nowhere read that he did, unless an isolated phrase at the very last referred to them. And if he did, it must be owned that his prayers seem to have been of as little avail as so many excellent human prayers have often been.

Of the "good" Jesus has in store for those who hated him, and for those who have never either hated him or thought about him, we will not here darken our page by even naming.

The practical illustrations of these amiable maxims furnished by Christian annals are not better than the sorrowful ones shown to us and openly declared by Christianity's founder. Martyrdom and cheerful submission to injustice and affliction for a place-in-heaven's sake are abundant enough in those annals. But not only love of enemies, but even that approach towards fellow-feeling to opponents often met with in all controversies but religious ones, is painfully conspicuous by its absence in Christian history. Like most other religionists, Christians have been good haters; and, alas! especially so of each other, as shown in internal strifes and ill-usages.

It should be borne in mind that this sermon on the mount was delivered at the outset of Jesus' career. How loving and how sanguine we all feel to be in the morning of life, before the frictions and disappointments and non-fulfilments of even the happiest human existences have sobered if not soured us!

By carrying out the exhortations just named, Jesus assures his hearers that they will be the children of the Father in heaven. In one sense, and primary sense, it is usually understood that all human beings are children of this same Father. But there is much in these Christian Scriptures that is both puzzling and alarming on this point. We hear of elect and non-elect, of vessels of wrath and vessels of honour, predestined and fore-ordained. Jesus speaks of children of hell; and between the children of the kingdom and the rest of the human species he draws a very sharp and unpleasant distinction.

The sense in which the observance of these commands of his will cause his hearers to be children of the heavenly Father, is that by

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

such observance they will resemble that Father, who himself acts on these principles. Of this fact Jesus adduces two proofs by showing that sunshine and rain descend equally on the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. Extreme care must be taken not to push this inference too far. The absolute impartiality of the heavenly Father and his return of good for evil are, as we shall find only too much reason to think from what we meet with in this Gospel, highly precarious deductions.

The truth of the observations here made by Jesus is very evident. It is perfectly clear that our heavenly Father sends his gentle rain and his floods, his sunshine and his storms, his harvests and his droughts, his zephyrs, and his tornados, upon all men alike. The utter indifference of Nature to moral considerations, the entire absence in her workings of any regard to justice or injustice, or to favouritism of any kind, always palpable to unprejudiced observation, has become by the aid of Science universally manifest to us moderns. It is, however, curious to reflect how widespread, nay, universal and persistent, the opposite belief once was. The ideas that the laws or processes of Nature were deflected for and against men, that prayer to the gods would arrest and divert the course of Nature, and that the operations of Nature were arranged or interfered with to produce "visitations" and "judgments," were the original ideas of all, or well-nigh all, nations, as they still are of savages. A highly amusing and significant feature of these beliefs was that much diversity and confusion prevailed as to whether Nature made for and favoured the righteous or the wicked. Hence ancient maxims and proverbs and wise sayings are about equally divided on this score.

It is indeed quite evident that Nature would have had to be constructed on quite other than the existing principles and plan in order to rain on the unjust without wetting the righteous, and to make sunrise illumine some men and not others.

Proceeding with his argument, Jesus asks his hearers what reward they have for merely returning love for love. "Do not even the publicans the same?" he asks. To such a pitch of excellence as the return of love for love even the worst of people—noticeably typified to these Jewish hearers by the term publican—had attained.

Jesus here descends to very small matters. And it is certainly

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

pleasing thus to see him condescending to little things. Religious founders are such great personages; they deal with, or at least they talk about, such very big things that it is quite welcome to see them coming down for a short time to homely subjects. And yet, after all, salutations are not, perhaps, such humble matters as they at first appear.

47 And 'if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others?* do not even the publicans so?

Jesus' own method of saluting his enemies we shall, Reader, see only too abundantly displayed in this Gospel. His usual salutation was that of Hypocrites! but it was varied by Vipers! and by a very large assortment of like epithets. One whole chapter of this Gospel almost entirely consists of a long string of such "salutations."

Theory and practice have ever been sadly at variance in men, even in the best of men; a regrettable fact which is usually ascribed to human frailty. It is, however, startling to find that no more extreme instance of this can be found than that afforded to us by the Prophet of Nazareth.

He exhorted men to love their enemies; in what way or sense he loved his own we do not know. He bade men bless their enemies, even the bitter ones who cursed them. In what sense Jesus blessed his own bitter opponents we are entirely unable to discover. He enjoined men to do good to those who hated them. Certain furnaces that will never grow cold and which are attended to by his own angels are the very singular species of good Jesus announces he intends to return to those who hated him, and to those also who never felt that sentiment whilst here, but who will have good and valid reasons for feeling it hereafter if the threats referred to are actually carried into effect.

It may be contended that Jesus is exempt from the obligations of his own maxims. We entirely fail to perceive any valid ground for such a contention; and decline to accept any of the pretended justifications of such a contention we have ever come across. Indeed such a contention runs entirely counter to the very reasoning and analogy Jesus is here pursuing. Resemblance to his Father, that is, to himself, is the express ground of obligation here assigned for the carrying out of the very maxims in question.

Unhappily, a much more truthful and effective justification of the practical conduct of Jesus to his own opponents may be found in the fact that his own theoretical propositions and declar-

ations were of so extremely diverse and varied a nature that his practice was, and indeed could not fail to be, in accord with some of them.

The sober truth is that the doctrines of Jesus were an astonishing admixture upon almost every subject he honoured with recorded mention. The household of faith as we see it before us to-day is but a living exemplification of the recorded contradictions of its founder.

The chapter is brought to a close with an exhortation of a very extraordinary kind. Jesus urges his hearers to become perfect, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The suggestion, nay the thought, that man may, or can, or even should, become perfect even as the First Person of the Trinity is perfect is enough to take away our breath. Never, surely, was poor man so highly honoured before. We are not at all sure that had this notion been even hinted at by any less authority than Jesus himself it would not have been pronounced to be an unbecoming and irreverent one.

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Here however, Reader, there arises a very grave question. Is the Father in heaven here spoken of the Jehovah set before us in the Jewish Scriptures? If this be so, then it becomes our duty in accordance with the prime purpose of this work to write down that for ourselves we firmly and emphatically decline to accept the model in question as one either suitable to or worthy of our resemblance and imitation. If the sayings and the doings ascribed to Jehovah in the Jewish Scriptures and the general portraiture of him there furnished be authentic, we have no option but to declare that that portrait and those actions are much more nearly a model of what a good man ought not to be and ought not to do. We will not begrime our pages by quoting the flagrancies which would so abundantly show this.

If, on the contrary, the Father in heaven here referred to be the ideal God, the Goodness personified, so often portrayed or attempted to be portrayed by man, and which is probably now the mainly current notion of a Deity, then however mournfully weak may be men's faith in the objective reality of such a Father in heaven, the conception itself is at least an exalted one, and as a theoretical standard may be both useful and encouraging.

But no historical deity, no prophet, nor any fellow mortal known

to history is deserving of unqualified human imitation. It is a pleasing and a true reflection that of these three categories, unheaven-aided but noble specimens of our own species have offered to us the highest and truest patterns and examples of goodness.

MATTHEW VI.

THE subject of alms-giving is now adverted to by Jesus; and upon that act—and presumably upon all kindred offices of sympathy—he enjoins the principle of strict secrecy. Generosity is an exception to the just-inculcated principle of letting our light shine before men that they may “see” our “good works.”

CHAPTER VI.
1 *Christ continueth his sermon in the mount, speaking of alms, 5 prayer, 14 forgiving our brethren, 16 fasting, 19 where our treasure is to be laid up, 24 of serving God, and mammon: 25 exhorteth not to be careful for worldly things: 33 but to seek God's kingdom.*

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Regarding many forms of charity or benevolence this is obviously just advice; regarding other forms of that virtue it cannot be considered so. A sensible man who relieves distress in a deserving case will instinctively keep his own counsel, not only from a very

proper aversion to ostentation as regards himself, but also out of regard for the feelings of the recipient of his aid. But the same man will none the less very properly place his name on the subscription list of a hospital or amongst the supporters of any other worthy object; and in so doing will act more wisely than if he had given his money without his name. A worthy example in giving is as admirable as in other things. Publicity is as legitimate and desirable in many forms of generosity as it is in the case of other qualities and virtues. The great donors and founders to whom we owe so many a noble work have their memories justly cherished, and it would have been regrettable had their names been unknown to us. A parade of generosity is, it is quite true, obnoxious; but so also is a parade of any of the other virtues—in the case of some of them even much more obnoxious. The truth is that the making known and the concealing our light and goodness depend for their appropriateness, as so much of human conduct depends, upon the surrounding circumstances of the action. Another great founder, Buddha, has a very pretentious dictum upon this subject. “Hide your good deeds and confess your sins,” said that celebrity; one of

those many saintly-looking injunctions which are found on careful examination to mainly consist of pure cant and simple affectation.

The censure of the display of alms "before men to be seen of them," understood in the sense of the following verse, is a well deserved one. We have no choice, Reader, but to declare that in our opinion alms done for a "reward" in heaven are not one whit better however.

Some few expositors have taken the sounding of a trumpet here

2 Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

named in its literal sense; and when we remember the phylacteries and bordered garments used by the Jews to advertise their piety it is not possible to pronounce such a view altogether impossible. Still there is nothing to corroborate such a supposition; and there is little doubt that the sounding a

trumpet here named by Jesus is a figure of speech probably then commonly used for denoting great ostentation. The gracious and extremely condescending way in which our Creator made use of colloquial expressions then current—even of such types thereof as the wisdom of the serpent and the swallowing of a camel—is a point concerning which it is difficult to say whether it ought more to please or to astonish us.

Whatever may have been the precise methods used in the synagogues and the streets by these hypocrites to draw attention to their almsgiving, the motive of their actions says Jesus was to obtain "glory of men." This very evident inference need in no way be doubted. But it is quite possible, we think, that this may not have been their sole motive. To have an eye to both worlds, to seek to make the best of both, is a philosophy which though much practised in modern times is by no means a modern discovery.

"They have their reward," adds Jesus. It is not very clear whether this simply means that these alms-exhibitors obtained the glory of men they aimed at, or that they will be "rewarded" by Jesus himself in his final adjudication upon mundane things. Probably both these meanings are intended.

In direct opposition to such trumpeting of alms Jesus bids his

3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

hearers preserve a rigid silence in the disbursing of their gifts. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." It is

usually supposed that this was a proverbial phrase of the time for indicating extreme secrecy. Others think it an original metaphor of Jesus' own. Those who adopt the latter view think it an extremely fine and profound one. We are not much concerned whether this particular figure of speech was of human or of divine origin. Its authorship is not worth contending for, for it is decidedly below even the average of metaphors.

Most earnestly, Reader, do we enter our protest against the teaching and against the motive to almsgiving held up to men in this verse. Charity exercised for the sake of a "reward" in heaven is as utterly sordid as that done for the "glory of men." The only noble and worthy incentive to charity and to kindlinesses of every kind is to do them for the sake of those who need them.

The interested self-seeking motive to charity here held up by Jesus opens up the interesting subject of the relationship of religion to philanthropy. The philanthropic feeling—love, sympathy, compassion, and a desire to succour the distressed—is altogether independent of and prior to religion of every kind. And in our humble judgment that noble human feeling instead of being furthered in the world by the religions has upon the whole been grievously hindered and thwarted by them all.

It is perfectly true that the religious have traded heavily upon this philanthropic passion; they have taken the humanities under their distinguished patronage and have held out post-mortem rewards therefor almost as much as for faith in themselves even.

Nor can it be denied that much of the charitable work that has been done in the world has had its origin in the religious motive and impulse—the hope and calculation of a reward so candidly set before us in the present verse. It may, too, be admitted that such works are beneficial, whatever we may think of such an incentive thereto, just as like works may be beneficial even if due to a pursuit of the "glory of men." And of the two motives in question we are bound to confess that the latter is in our estimate the more elevated or more properly the less venal. Both are forms of that self-seeking in the rôle of self-sacrifice the world is so familiar with.

Genuine philanthropy—the doing of good without hope of reward and for the simple sake of our fellow beings who need it from us—

is a noble thing. We believe there is a great deal of it already in our world, and that there will be more and more as the unworthy simulations of it pass away. And yet this true philanthropy is far from being without its recompense—its recompense in consciousness; for the pleasure of relieving sorrow and suffering is a very exquisite one—probably the most exquisite a normal man can feel.

We cannot leave this verse without a renewal of strong dissent from its ignoble “moral.” Doing good from a desire for the glory of men may not be an elevated thing, but doing good for a reward in heaven is more venal still. The bequests of money for masses for the repose of their souls, customary with our Christian ancestors—more refined forms of which act may be not seldom seen in modern wills—were not more deliberate purchases of, or at any rate bids for, heavenly bliss than is the practice of alms when done from the motive named in this verse by Jesus. The sacrifice of time and of money and the personal discomfort endured in the belief and from the motive that such acts are being watched by heaven and placed to our credit there are proceedings as thoroughly selfish and mercenary as—nay, more completely so than—the mercantile bargains of every-day life.

Prayer is the subject Jesus now passes on to deal with—a subject he deals with at greater length than any other referred to in this sermon.

5 ¶ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

And first of all he, as in the preceding matter of almsgiving, condemns publicity and display in prayer. He points out how in the matter of prayer, as of gifts, hypocrites wish to be seen of men; for which purpose they selected syna-

gogues and street corners as the scenes of their devotions, and used the standing posture.

In entire contradiction, in form and in spirit, to such methods Jesus enjoins secrecy in prayer—secrecy the most strict and absolute. For this purpose Jesus gives very drastic practical instructions. When we wish to pray we are to enter our closet; to shut the door; and to pray to the Father “which is in secret.”

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

This certainly seems the sensible course in such a matter, for it is impossible to see what third parties can have to do with the process

in question. Indeed, in the presence of third parties, it is obvious our prayers will be worded and selected more with a view to the effect upon such parties than the effect upon heaven itself. In privacy it is conceivable and natural that prayer would be perfectly open and truthful; specific personal sin avowed, and the real wishes of our heart plainly asked for. But in public prayer personal sins are not owned to, but instead thereof vague generalities are recited; not what is true but what is "proper" is mainly looked to. So much is this the case that the prayers we usually hear in public are so plainly addressed to listeners themselves, so carefully designed for effect upon the human ears of those present, that they often cease to have any real or tolerable resemblance to a natural address to the Father they are nominally intended for.

Christian commentators are eager to assure us that in what Jesus here says he did not mean to condemn public prayer when performed in proper manner and at proper time and place. It must be owned, Reader, that it was the habit of the Prophet of Nazareth to leave the subjects he dealt with in a condition of much uncertainty, to be deciphered by his followers as best they can. The re-marriage of a divorced person we were a short time ago dwelling upon is a case in point. And the controversies even on the most vital points which have so deplorably—but in view of Jesus' own deliverances thereupon—so naturally splintered the household of faith are a sorrowful proof of this strange and unfortunate fact. If the strict secrecy in the matter of prayer Jesus here lays down was not meant by him to exclude public, joint, and common devotion, his own assurance to that effect would have been much preferable to that of his commentators.

The secret prayer thus enjoined will, Jesus adds, be responded to by the Father in the manner set forth in the last words of this verse. The Father will "reward thee openly." It is very noticeable that compliance is not promised. What is this reward? Where and when will it come into effect? Alas! even the antithetical "openly" is of precarious authenticity.

Not only publicity, but also "vain repetitions," Jesus condemns in prayer. The hypothesis dealt with—the beseeching of an omniscient being by a human one—certainly seems to render repetitions obviously uncalled for. A certain parable Jesus elsewhere propounded, and several refer-

⁷ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

ences in a like direction to that parable would, however, lead us to doubt whether repetitions in prayer thus applied to omniscience are altogether "vain." This latter view, that reiterations are not vain, seems to be the one adopted by Jesus' chief church, and also by some of his lesser ones, for it would not be easy even for the heathen to indulge in more repetition, vain or otherwise, than is practised by the Christians in question.

"As the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking." To our thinking there is something profoundly pathetic in this. The pathos, however, is in the sad fact thus referred to; not in the curt, unfeeling allusion to it here made by Jesus.

Yes, the heathen "think they shall be heard for their much speaking." Could anything be more sorrowful and more touching? And the person who here brings to mind this most pathetic fact is the very person who in heaven listens to all this "much speaking." But hears it in vain; is not touched or moved by it; but permits and has permitted it to go on from century to century, and from generation to generation.

This mass of human beings, this vast majority of our kind, supplicating Heaven in the best way they know how—but in vain—is a scene that would not surely fail to move the stoniest heart. Yet Jesus has quietly looked down from heaven upon it from age to age; has heard all this much speaking and praying, but has permitted generation after generation to perish—to perish unheeded—the unilluminated victims of false religions. The ways of heaven are said to be past finding out. Are they worth finding out, Reader?

It being clear that these poor heathen are no better for their much speaking, we must agree that it is of no

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

use being "like unto them." Jesus had not a word of sympathy for these benighted heathen. And except as regards the fate he had in store for their immortal souls, we do

not think they, or at least many of them, specially required any. As far as this world and this life were concerned, many of the heathen, especially of those in neighbouring countries westwards, compared extremely favourably with those children of Israel who had up to this date solely enjoyed the only divine light which had hitherto been sent down to our earth. Jesus had certain "heathen"

contemporaries, comparison with whom on the part of any Israelites would have been to the latter a very sorry one indeed.

We like the frank statement made in the latter portion of this verse exceedingly. If there be an omniscient God, he knows right well what all his creatures, not only human beings, but all sentient things, have "need of." If it be the pleasure of such Being that, so far as men are concerned, their needs should be prayed for—well and good; though the vanity of the much speaking to that end on the part of the "heathen," who have always constituted the great bulk of mankind, does not seem very encouraging on this head. Be this as it may, divine attention to the needs of those humbler animated beings whose sufferings and wants are, in our humble judgment, as deserving of sympathy as our own, and those even of our children cannot, we presume, be thus self-prayed for. Whether in consequence of this inability to pray, or otherwise, we often find the wants of both these latter grievously unattended to. If the omniscient being in question or supposition be also a humane being, no real need of any of his creatures would be unsupplied.

But though the heavenly Father already knows all, not only when, but "before" we ask him, we are nevertheless to supplicate him. We cannot give him any information, but we can declare to him how dutiful, submissive, and reverential we are; we can tell him how conscious we are of his own greatness and our own smallness, and how dependent we know we are upon his good will for everything; we can beseech him to treat us kindly; to keep us from the evil so plentifully met with in this portion of his universe; and we can assure him of our own desire to do what he wishes, and to render him any glory it is possible for such creatures as ourselves to render him.

The natural inference from all this is that such an attitude and such proceedings on our part please our heavenly Father. It is, however, possible that the object, or another object, is to produce in ourselves a subjective frame of mind considered to be desirable for our own sake. This latter is, we think, a more probable and preferable view; for how the praises of such beings as men can yield pleasure to an omniscient being is not only a mystery, but is a supposition that has a decidedly unpleasant suggestiveness about it.

Men are therefore to pray. For though this is not laid down as absolutely obligatory, it is clearly enjoined and commended by Jesus.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

For this purpose he most graciously gives us in this and the four following verses a form of prayer, which he directs men to use and recite. It is the short and familiar supplication known by the name of the Lord's Prayer. We cannot help the remark, Reader, that looked at from the Trinitarian standpoint, these directions of Jesus how we are to worship him show a wonderful condescension on his part. Some may possibly think it a condescension of a two-fold kind.

The account of the prescribing of this Lord's Prayer, and the occasion thereof, given in the third Gospel, may well make us doubt the unity and continuity of this sermon as we here find it in this first Gospel. For it occurs in the very middle of the third Gospel, between an account of how "a certain woman named Martha had received him (Jesus) into her house" and a description of his expulsion of a certain dumb devil which caused the Pharisaic theory of Jesus' exorcisms to be suggested. The following is the account of the Lord's Prayer now before us furnished by the third Gospel. "And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray say, 'Our Father which art,' " &c.

The precise time and occasion of the prescribing of this prayer by Jesus are not matters of any real moment. It is the intrinsic sentiments of the prayer itself that are of import and of interest to us. Our non-possession of the prayer John taught his disciples is perhaps to be regretted.

"Our Father." According to the theory of a creative deity, it is manifest that such a deity is the Father not only of the human race, but of all other beings and things whatsoever. Inasmuch, however, as the human race, whether created or evolved, is, with all its failings, considerably superior in most respects to the other animated creations or products, at least to those on our own little globe, it has been a general belief amongst our species that we are objects of much interest—of special and peculiar interest—to the Creator of the "Milky Way." Many great thinkers have, it is true, questioned this notion and expressed their inability to discern any ground of probability for it. But such impious iconoclasm has not shaken either Christian piety or the pieties of other creeds upon this subject; and the keen interest taken by Heaven in our personal, human, and mundane affairs is very generally thought to still continue, though it certainly no longer

takes the visible and often curious shapes it took in the earlier history of our race, as so fully described to us in the Jewish and in other Scriptures.

It is not, of course, possible for us to use the phrase "Our Father" in the definite and literal sense in which, as we learn from the first chapter of this Gospel, the Prophet of Nazareth could use it. We are, however, told that the feeling of the heavenly Father towards us bears some resemblance to that of the human parental affection; bears, indeed, a very close resemblance, for he loves and chastises us, grants and withholds our requests, and is both pleased and grieved with our behaviour.

It is, however, disappointing to find that the analogy between human fatherhood—that of a good and just and kind father—and the heavenly one, does not hold good in the matter of the fair and equal treatment of his children. Up to the time when Jesus spoke this verse eighteen and a half centuries ago, the heavenly Father had been the God of Israel, but not—except in a very faint and secondary sense—of any of the other nations. These latter had been permitted to become—and to remain—the victims of false and fatal systems, even. The "children's" bread was avowedly withheld from the great bulk of the heavenly Father's children; a course which Jesus for some time after the delivery of this sermon himself carefully adhered to.

And according to one great school of Christian theology—which finds in these Scriptures only too much, Reader, to justify its theory—the heavenly Father continues, in an altered but even a still worse shape, the invidious system of favouritism amongst his children he practised in olden times. That favouritism no longer takes the national form. His old favourites are now discarded; and in the general opinion of the most competent judges no other people has taken the place so long occupied by the children of Israel. Heaven's favour now takes the individual and personal form. Our race now consists of the elect and the non-elect, manifestly mainly of the latter. From our inception we are vessels of wrath and vessels of honour respectively.

It is clear that the use of the prayer now before us by the non-elect of mankind is altogether useless. It is, indeed, eminently inappropriate. If it be possible to tell the elect from the non-elect, as some contend, the discontinuance of the use of this prayer by the latter is much to be desired on every ground.



“Hallowed be thy name.” The conception of a good God—a great being of perfect goodness and righteousness, is indeed a lovable and glorious one. If we had firm faith in the existence of such a being no truer Amen to the sentence before us would be uttered than that which would issue from our own humble lips, Reader.

But if the name here enjoined to be hallowed be that of Jehovah, of the Jehovah described to us in the Jewish Scriptures, and who will hold the “judgment” day set before us in this Gospel, then we once more say that we firmly and resolutely decline to do anything of the kind.

“Thy kingdom come.” The kingdom of God or of heaven is, as we have already observed, a phrase not easy to comprehend or define. That it is a state of affairs heaven wishes to bring about on our globe is the only fact we can with certainty aver concerning this kingdom. The fact that this kingdom was “at hand” eighteen centuries ago leads us to the presumption that it has in some measure at least now arrived amongst us. Many think the Christian Church is the kingdom in question; but the highly uncertain and disputatious character of that Church itself makes its use for the identification of the kingdom of heaven a very precarious one.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in
earth, as it is in heaven.

Seeing that the kingdom of God is by supposition a state of affairs desirable on all hands and, above all desired by God himself, it seems passing strange that that kingdom has not come long ago; or rather that any other state of things should even temporarily have ever been permitted to exist. Seeing that all the obstacles that have ever impeded the coming of that kingdom would have vanished at the touch of an almighty hand, the human mind, in contemplating the curious problem of the non-arrival or delayed arrival of that kingdom, must adopt one of two alternatives. Either we must plainly ascribe the non-arrival of the kingdom of heaven amongst us to heaven itself; or we must mentally succumb to the problem by meekly accepting some mystic formula honoured with the title of reason, a great variety of which has been constructed to meet this as well as other religious enigmas.

If the kingdom of heaven, Reader, mean the reign of light, and knowledge, and goodness, on our earth, then that kingdom has during these last four centuries been gradually coming amongst us.

But that happy result has been due to the lives, labours, discoveries, and teachings of our own fellow men; of men who in many cases have held the celestial illuminations of the Prophet of Nazareth and all other prophets in scant esteem, and of men who found no bitterer enemies in their glorious work than the followers and chief representatives of these prophets.

"Thy will be done." The first and irresistible thought that comes as we ponder this is, is anything else really possible? Is it actually possible for God's will to be set aside; to be not done; and some other will be done instead? And if so, how comes so mysterious a state of things to pass?

We are here, of course, assuming the omnipotence of God, for if, as some philosophers have argued, his power is limited it is obvious his will must be liable to a corresponding abridgment. This however is a heresy which need not here be entertained.

If, therefore, God's will be not done it is clear it must be because he consents to, or permits, or, to use a phrase found in these Scriptures, winks at a contrary course. It is manifest that nothing could be done in spite of such a being; and that anything not in accordance with his wishes is entirely due to sufferance and toleration on his part, his motive for which toleration cannot be conjectured by us. With an almighty being it is palpable that everything is his will. Everything existing, if not his wish, has his consent, the giving of which consent necessarily involves acquiescence and responsibility.

It appears, however, that God's will in the sense of his wishes, is not carried out on our earth—a very obvious fact indeed if that will be what it is usually understood to be. This grievous state of things we are to try to alter by praying to God that his will may be done on our globe. The power of the heavenly Father to give instantaneous effect to this amiable prayer is obvious; and obvious also is the fact that he does not choose to exercise that power.

"As it is in heaven." Though God's will is unhappily not done on our own planet it is, it appears, done in heaven. Unfortunately, Reader, it is only too true that God's will has not always been done even in heaven. Things have not always gone on smoothly even there. The peace has been disturbed even in that serene abode. We know indeed too little of the mighty outbreak that once took place there to form any opinion of its cause or its merits. The fact, however, we know, and its melancholy consequences to our race

we know also. If we understand the matter aright—and this assurance of Jesus certainly seems to make the point clear—all is now again as it should be in heaven ; the disobedient angels having been all purged out.

It must be owned that the mighty tumult that once took place in heaven does not seem a very reassuring subject of reflection to our friends who are intending to go there. Since the time of Jesus, too, heaven has been recruited by great numbers of Christians who fell out with each other very much whilst they were here. No doubt all the points of quarrel, which were so unfortunately left open here, will have been cleared up in that brighter land. Still it must be a singular sensation even in heaven for pious persecutors to meet their pious victims and for theologians who anathematized each other here to meet and embrace each other there. Whether any danger to the future peace of heaven exists from this source, or from the possible falling of more angels, who shall say ?

This assurance of Jesus that his Father's will is now done in heaven does not seem to make us any the wiser as to what that will is here on earth. It is true that this particular prayer is ostensibly a beseeching of God to have his own way here and an apparent calling upon him to effect that object himself ; but there can be little doubt that its practical meaning is that the supplicant should, and wishes to, help with his own little mite in bringing the result in question to pass. It is in this sense that God's will practically concerns men.

What, then, is God's will which he desires us men to do on this little globe of ours ? Alas, Reader, a perfect Babel falls on our ears in response to this question. When we attempt to go beyond those moral duties known to us without the various celestial illuminations, we encounter nothing but a horrid hubbub of discordant asseverations proceeding from the throats of our fellow mortals, each of whom is as sincere as, but clearly knows as little as his neighbour. From the many benighted ones who frankly tell us that, so far from knowing God's will, they are not even sure of his existence, up to those well-informed people who are acquainted with the divine will in detail, there proceeds a response to this question that is as painful as it is bewildering. The world presents to-day what it has ever presented—a religious chaos ; and the household of Christian faith presents its full quota to this mournful result.

And it is here that this reference of Jesus, "as it is in heaven"

ought apparently to come in. When we tell some one to do a thing as it is done elsewhere we either pre-suppose the person already knows how the thing in question is done in the place referred to, or we explain it to him. But we do not unhappily know how God's will is done in heaven, nor does Jesus tell us. To do God's will as it is done in heaven therefore simply leaves us where we were.

Descending from the extremely abstruse to the extremely practical and prosaic, Jesus now enjoins men to

11 Give us this day
our daily bread.

pray for their daily bread.

Religions have always taught men that as between Man and God, Man has no rights and God no duties. We have not the humblest vestige of a *locus standi*; and any such feeling on our part as self-respect, or the belief that we have any valid claim to anything is flat impiety. Abjectness the most complete, and servility the most crouching, are the proper attitude—so most religions tell us—of man to God. All our better qualities—by supposition implanted in us by this same God—must be suppressed, and their opposites assumed in our bearing towards our supposed Maker.

In accordance with these notions we are to beg daily for our daily rations. We have no right to be fed; we are to beseech our heavenly Father not to starve us. We are also to make a further effort to believe that these feelings are very becoming in us, and very pleasing and complimentary to the Father which is in heaven.

We thus see that the analogy of human fatherhood does not here hold good. Our human parents have duties to us, but our heavenly Father has none. He created each of us of his own free will, without desire or knowledge on our part, and from motives and for purposes known only to his own consciousness. But we have no kind of claim upon him. The fact that he has called us into being of his own will entails no kind of duty to feed and sustain us. This we are to beg as a favour pure and simple.

Very well, Reader. Any man who feels that this lovely theory commends itself to him must continue to nurse it. But when he tells us he is honouring his Maker thereby, we will take the liberty of not agreeing with him. Very different from all this would, in our estimate, be the attitude and bearing of a good man to a good God. That a human being should look up to heaven with the feeling that he has rights as well as duties may be deemed

impious by religionists, but it is, we believe, the real and the very just feeling of every unreligionized mind.

Starting with the supposition that man is the work of a good God, we utterly demur to the contention that the frame of mind and the sentiments we have just been referring to are the proper and becoming ones for man to cultivate towards such a Being. To such a Being would be due our gratitude and our love; and an intense desire to work with him and for him in all good purposes and to aid in all objects desired by him to the utmost extent of all the limited powers he has given to us.

But to proclaim ourselves—his work—miserable creatures; to cherish a spirit of slavishness to him; to beg him not to wrong us; and to offer him a mass of tedious, insipid adulation; not such would be the duties of a good man to a good God. Such thoughts and feelings as these may be termed piety; but infinitely more even than to man himself are they lowering to the being they are perversely thought to honour. The crouching and the babe-like “mind” inculcated—on some points—by religionists, is but a simalacrum of, and not seldom a travesty of, that real virtue of modesty all men love so well.

It is, Reader, a subject of great satisfaction to reflect that if we take the proper steps to obtain our daily bread we do obtain it; and that if we do not take such steps and simply ask God to give it us he will take no notice of us. Doubtless both methods of obtaining bread may be combined; but it is found that whilst the former alone is quite sufficient to that end, the latter is not. We are quite aware that manna has been rained, and that Jesus himself extemporized bread and also fish on a very large scale. But such acts were strictly confined to the Jews; our heavenly Father never did this for any of his other numerous children. Even in the touching sieges of Christian cities when the plan of praying for bread has had to be tried alone, it has invariably been painfully discovered to be of no good.

Forgiveness of our “debts” is the next request we are to make.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

The precise meaning of “debts” in this connection is not easy to fix. Debts owing to God as to our fellow-men are conceivable, no doubt;

but sins, both of omission and sins of positive transgression are probably intended to be understood. Christian commentators here very thoughtfully point out that as Jesus himself had no debts in

any sense of the word the form of prayer he is here using is simply a model vouchsafed and adapted for our use, and that in this particular case Jesus graciously uses a phrase entirely inapplicable to himself.

How much men, even the best, need the forgiveness of each other we all well know; and to seek forgiveness when we need it is a manly and worthy act. In our duties to God—even if we knew more clearly than we do what those duties are—there would doubtless be, even in the best, many shortcomings also. To seek the pardon of heaven for our deficiencies in duty thereto, if we are conscious of them, seems a very natural and proper course, just as with our fellows.

There is something rather naive in the inviting God to follow our own example contained in this verse. The suggestion that God should measure and regulate his conduct according to our own is dealt with in two verses following the next one, and in which the principle thereof is entirely adopted.

“Lead us not into temptation” is the next petition we are to address to our heavenly Father. This cannot be considered a very felicitous phrase; it is in truth a very awkward one. For though “lead us not into” may be practically equivalent to “keep us out of,” the underlying thought is a vitally different one.

We are told that God tempteth no man. We learn, however, from the book of Job that he may authorize Satan to do it. And it must be admitted that a contest with that fell potentate is not to be desired, but avoided if it be possible to do so. The first parents of our race got the worst in such an encounter, with results to their remote progeny of a disastrous and permanent kind.

The additional prayer, “deliver us from evil” is, indeed, a happy and appropriate one for human use. We unhappily live in a portion of space where evils of all kinds are very plentiful. Some of these are unquestionably due to man himself, but many are entirely beyond his control or remedy.

Many of us may, perhaps, think that to “deliver evil from us” or, better still, to destroy and end it altogether would be a much better and nobler course than even helping us to evade and escape it. Theologians have, it is true, shown us how necessary evil and temptation are for the purpose of testing and perfecting the saints. But unfortunately they are not confined to the saints.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

This Lord's Prayer is brought to a close with a doxology. Christianity has so accustomed us to doxologies to the three persons of the Trinity that this one, in which the first person alone is named, feels somewhat bare. Jesus, however, could not well use the more complete formula as yet. Hence we must regard this prayer as—on this head—somewhat incomplete. This doxology, as is well known, is of highly doubtful authenticity altogether.

It is some 1860 years, Reader, since Jesus was here and left us this authorized form of prayer. It would be a curious computation could we count the times this prayer has since been recited. What effect all these supplications have had seems a matter of a highly conjectural nature.

Whether God's name is more hallowed than formerly; whether his kingdom or any portion of it has yet arrived upon our planet; and whether his will is now better done or any approach towards that end is being made, seem singularly open questions.

The extent to which the name of Jesus' Father is hallowed in our world is still painfully limited. The great bulk of the prayer, praise, and worship that ascends from our earth is still, as it has ever been, false worship of false gods. The huge and venerable systems that were here when Jesus came are here yet; and a very formidable new one has likewise since made its appearance in the world. These seem very sorrowful subjects to reflect upon. For if the toleration of all these things may be thought to bear witness to the marvellous nature of the divine forbearance and patience, the appalling loss of everlasting souls thus involved cannot, it seems to us, be dwelt upon with satisfaction or even mental endurance.

Of the extent to which the divine name is hallowed—and especially of its proper method of hallowing—in the portion of our world to which the name of "Christendom" is usually affixed, it is impossible to speak without raising some highly disputatious questions. When contrasted with the ages of faith that for so many centuries prevailed in "Christendom" the present condition of things seems a startlingly retrogressive one. We are not now alluding to the disruptions of, and the internal antagonisms in, the strange "household" of faith now to be seen in our world, though those are sufficiently portentous. We refer rather to those modern discoveries and revelations which have made faith so doubly arduous; which call upon us to harmonize theses the reconciliation

of which only very exceptional minds are equal to. But above all, the goodness of Christianity and of the Christian "scheme" which used to be regarded as a stronger point than its truth has in recent times undergone, and deservedly undergone, a melancholy depreciation in the esteem of men.

The kingdom of God is a subject of such an abstruse and uncertain nature that surmises as to whether it has come in any measure, or whether there are any signs of its advent, would be a profitless inquiry.

As to the doing of God's will upon our earth, if it be his wish and desire that mankind should become devout believers in any given system of religion, then he must be experiencing grievous disappointment; disappointment as grievous as that which once led him to destroy our race with a flood.

But if it be his will and desire to see our race growing in knowledge of all kinds, and especially in knowledge of that Nature which is his own handiwork; if it be his wish to see mankind progressing in all good ways and works, and especially in kindness to each other and in juster dealings between man and man; if it be a pleasure to him to see man by the exercise of his own powers ameliorating all his surroundings over which Nature permits his control, thus removing one after another the evils that have afflicted him in the past, and thus gradually rendering the state of this world a nearer approach to the reign of goodness and righteousness—then, Reader, these latter ages are, indeed, helping to hasten the coming of the heavenly kingdom and the carrying out of the divine will. And in such senses well may we all join in praying and hoping and, better still, in working that the kingdom of heaven may come, and the divine will be done on our earth.

Going back to one of the clauses in his prayer—that of the forgiveness of debts—Jesus lays down the principle that forgiveness of our own trespasses by God is entirely contingent upon our forgiveness of other men's trespasses against us. The practical result of this principle is that if men will only forgive each other, trespasses will be sponged out all round.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you :

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

There was nothing new in this principle. There was in sober truth very little that was new in this entire sermon. Many of these hearers had, doubtless, often heard or read the son of

Sirach's declaration, "Forgive thy neighbour the hurt he hath done thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest." The same idea may be met with freely elsewhere. That a forgiving spirit is alone deserving of forgiveness does not seem a difficult discovery to make, but seems rather to be an obvious and natural feeling which had, doubtless, often been acted upon by men before they had advanced to the dignity of making aphorisms.

Again coming down from the great to the small, or rather to the trivial, Jesus proceeds to deal with the subject of fasting. We cannot help owning, Reader, that after being called upon to contemplate the lofty heights and matters set before us in this sermon, these occasional droppings down to humble things are very agreeable.

16 ¶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast, Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

In dealing with this subject of fasting Jesus begins, as he began in the matters of alms and of prayer, by pointing out the actions of hypocrites in the matter. Hypocrites seem to have been a numerous and important class in those days. It is to be feared they have been more or less so in all ages. They are an inevitable concomitant of a religious system, except perhaps in its earliest and humblest days when its attractions for and inducements to hypocrisy are not great. Hypocrites are indeed then found amongst the fashionable throng which derides and ill-uses a new evangel. But when a religion becomes prevalent and proper they join it in full force. It is one of the bitterest reflections of the sincere adherent to an unpopular belief that he is persecuted, scouted, and derided by hypocrites; and in many cases especially and prominently by them.

It is obvious that the temptation to hypocrisy varies proportionately with the degree of dominance of a creed. Hence we believe that in the leading countries of the world there is now much less deliberate hypocrisy than formerly. No doubt the poorer types of men and many indifferentists deliberately select what may in their own locality be conventionally thought or considered the proper type, or the most fashionable type, of "belief." But this, though a genuine, is now but a mild form of hypocrisy; the pressure and inducements to the worse kinds are happily now non-existent.

"Of a sad countenance." This is a happy touch. If the remark be applicable to omniscience, Jesus seems to have taken particular

notice of hypocrites and their behaviour. And as we find that Jesus shared all our other human emotions there cannot, we think, be any impropriety in supposing that he may have derived some diversion as well as sorrow in contemplating the doings of these simulators; though Jesus belonged in the flesh to a nationality singularly deficient in a sense of the humorous.

The upturned eye-balls, long drawn faces, abstracted airs, and saintly sighs with which even sincere pietists show us how they are prisoned in the flesh and yearn to soar away from us are not particularly attractive; but when put on by insincere and mock pietists they are certainly much less so.

“But thou, when thou fastest.” After the very sensible animadversion and satire upon the fasting of hypocrites given in the last verse, it is, we think, a pity to find Jesus proceeding to sanction and enjoin the practice of fasting itself. Of the two preliminaries to this accomplishment which Jesus recommends—“anoint thy head and wash thy face”—the latter is always to be commended; but the former, whatever be the compound used, is an uncleanly and very disagreeable proceeding which is best left uncomplied with.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

Fasting is a process which may be considered from two stand-points; that of its supposed subjective merit, and that of its practical utility. In its former aspect it is simply one branch of a very extensive subject; one particular exemplification of a religious theory that has many other ramifications. It is one particular application of that principle of self-denial, self-denudation, mortification of the flesh, and subjugation of the carnal mind so many and so various practical illustrations of which have been furnished by the various religions of the world. Fasting is one among many—indeed endless—exemplifications of the notion that by enduring self-sought and self-inflicted pain and privation the body is brought down and the soul “elevated.” And as such it belongs to the class of ideas of which sackcloth, hair shirts, peas in boots, ashes on the head, life in a cell, and countless other kindred examples which have been set before us by the ultra-pious of the various creeds, are other illustrations. What men have accomplished in pursuance of this theory forms a strange, but not an edifying record.

To voluntarily endure and even seek privation and pain are so contrary to normal human nature that the extent to which this has

been done in connection with the various religions is at first somewhat puzzling. But a little examination soon reveals the real character and real nature of this curious act on the part of our fellow mortals ; soon shows us what a very thin disguise of a very prosaic and unheroic motive these pretentious proceedings in reality are ; and soon makes plain to us that these curious-looking actions on the part of certain members of our race are none other than a search for, and a carefully calculated pursuit of, pleasure in the long run.

The plain truth, Reader, is that voluntary and self-sought suffering of the kind in question is not only a selfish affair but an extremely selfish one. Its one purpose, its one motive, is to curry favour with heaven and thereby secure for the bearer of such "privation" an exceptionally eligible place in the regions of bliss—a legitimate, it may be, but assuredly a very commonplace, self-seeking, and unheroic object. Religious self-sacrifice of all kinds is essentially of this extremely selfish kind at bottom. The monk who leaves the world for his cloister is a more mercenary calculator and speculator than his neighbour who goes to the stock-exchange. Neither the poor creature who throws himself beneath the Juggernaut car, nor the polished saint who "sacrifices" himself in some more refined way, is one bit of a true hero, but a specimen of our species in whom the selfish propensities are not exceptionally weak but exceptionally strong. The faithful Christian and the faithful Saracen who rushed at the unbeliever opposite him, indifferent to, nay often seeking, death, were no true heroes, but scramblers into Paradise.

In one brave miner who descends a burning pit to rescue his comrade, in one life-boatman who perishes to rescue a fellow seafarer there is more genuine nobility and true heroism than in all the self-sought religious privations the world has ever witnessed piled together.

The practical or hygienic utility of fasting is a physiological question that does not here concern us. Of the effectiveness of fasting as a spiritual stimulant no one but a very rash sceptic can entertain a doubt. Every year the world is treated to a highly curious spectacle. Two periods known as Lent and as Ramadan come round and the faithful of two great creeds proceed to comport themselves in a way to make the angels weep, or perhaps to make those august beings shake their sides if they are not

impervious to the humorous aspects of things. For at these periods these two sets of faithful men give themselves an extra coat of religious paint and call the special attention of heaven to their proceedings, in which fasting is the most striking element. The spiritual effectiveness of these acts cannot be doubted. The fruits of Lent in the heightened piety of Christians are well known; and of the increased faith and zeal of Islam from the observance of Ramadan the world has had many a bitter reminder.

This verse is one of many that is so variously regarded by different kinds of Christians. Catholics make much of it; Protestants almost ignore it.

The reward which Jesus asserts that his Father will bestow upon those who fast properly is left—as in the preceding cases—undisclosed. Whether fasting will be slenderly, moderately, or richly rewarded we do not know.

Let us hope it may be the first of these. Self-seeking in the rôle of self-sacrifice is a process mankind have witnessed *ad nauseam*. It is a process which, in the interests, and for the benefit and true furtherance of all good and worthy purposes amongst us, our race is greatly concerned in seeing brought to an end and held up to deserved scorn.

It may be remarked that Jesus' own example on this subject—so far as we know it—consisted in one prolonged fast and in that alone; for his ordinary course of life caused him to be unfavourably compared with others on this score and led even to the application to him of a very uncomplimentary epithet. The Baptist seems to have been much stricter and more severe. He apparently spent almost his whole life “in the deserts,” and both his garb and diet were extremely and continuously ascetic.

We thus see that the example of Jesus is entirely unsuitable as a precedent for our use on this as on so many other matters. Men are indeed said to have accomplished and even exceeded the fast Jesus sustained. But they have not succeeded in the more difficult task of getting men to admire the exploit.

What, Reader, are we really to think of the teaching now set before us? How are we to treat it? How interpret it?

19 ¶ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Are we to take it in all its nakedness and understand it in its plain literalness? Or are

we to do as most, though not all, Christians do, and insert the qualifying words Jesus did not think fit himself to insert and thus tone down this injunction to at least some approach to practical wisdom and good sense?

When we are told that by the exhortation "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," we are to understand that we are not to lay up too much treasure here and are not to concern and let ourselves be absorbed overmuch with that object, all we have to say is that we submit that if such were the real meaning and intention of Jesus it behoved him, as it ever behoves and behoved every one, to have made his intended meaning clear and unmistakable. In anything claiming to be grave and practical moral teaching, and in anything claiming to be heaven-given teaching, such obligation—yes Reader—obligation, is doubly great. Meanings then ought surely to be as clear, distinct, and indubitable as words can make them.

But if we accept the qualified and amended readings of the practical teachings set before us here and in the remainder of this chapter which are usually offered to us by Christian expositors and, in the present case, accept the thesis that Jesus meant here to condemn only the excessive laying up of earthly treasure, was it really worth the while of Jesus to come all the way from heaven to re-utter wisdom of such a kind?

For our part we firmly believe that Jesus here meant exactly and precisely what he said; not more and not less. We are convinced he meant to discountenance and condemn the "laying up" of earthly treasure in any and in every degree; and we consequently think his doctrine a pernicious one, one that if acted upon would drag down mankind to a poor level indeed. What indeed are all the noblest exertions and achievements of man, the mighty undertakings with which he has surmounted so many obstacles of Nature, and the works of beauty in all the arts with which he has by toil and labour adorned all things around him, but the laying and storing up of treasure on earth?

And was ever a serious and far-reaching proposition supported by such remarkably small reasons as are here assigned? Providence and thrift may, like all other virtues, be carried to a point where they become baneful. Many good and valid reasons may be given against the over-laying up of treasure. But moths, rust, and thieves, are about the smallest that could be named.

It appears, after all, that laying up treasures and making provision for the future are really sound and sensible processes. Man has not been altogether mistaken in setting a high value upon those habits and proceedings. It is simply a question of where his treasures and accumulations should be laid up.

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

The proper place, says Jesus, for man to store up his treasures and accumulations, is heaven. It is not necessary to dwell upon the immediate reasons which Jesus gives as an inducement to that course. That there are no moths, no rusts, and no thieves in heaven, is an assurance that need not be doubted. Perhaps, seeing that the question dealt with is that of the prudence and soundness of an investment, an assurance that there will not be any further disturbances in, and ejections from, that happy land might have been desirable.

When we think of the transitory nature of our earthly life, and the everlasting nature of the life said to await us hereafter, the chief devotion of our time and effort to the laying up of treasures for use and service in the latter and never-ending of our two lives seems to be the palpable and manifest dictate of ordinary sense and prudence. To make proper preparation for our earthly future is indeed a duty; but to prepare ourselves and make the necessary provision for an eternal life in heaven—if there be one—is plainly and obviously an immensely greater prudence and greater duty. Nor could any sensible man, any ordinary tradesman even, refuse to make his chief investment in heaven were he but satisfied with the security. It may seem true that the children of this world are wiser for their own little day and generation than the children of light. But a little reflection shows us that these same children of light are really the deep and knowing ones, if the supposition referred to be a sound one.

Unfortunately, Reader, it is only too true that all the heavens—and they are many—that have been held out to our race are entirely and solely the mere word-of-mouth assertions of their respective formulators. Of confirmation or corroboration of any one of them there does not exist so much as a vestige. Of the many human beings supposed to have gone to these varied heavens, no tidings have ever been heard. And yet our dear departed ones must surely yearn to let us know the mighty truth of

their, and of our, second and eternal lives. Why are they forbidden to communicate with us? Who can frame to himself even a poor reason for such a cruel interdict? And it seems not a little singular that we have also no tidings from the various hells. The celestial and infernal authorities are of one mind in prohibiting any messages to us from our friends under their care.

It is no doubt perfectly true that Jesus in another place furnishes us with a reason—if so manifest an excuse may be so termed—why a certain rich man who was in hell was refused his very honourable and humane request to send word to his mundane friends whom he feared were in a likely way for joining him. If they would not believe Moses and the prophets they would not, Jesus alleged, believe though one came from the dead. We will not discuss this lame and evasive allegation: it is not even plausible.

Of any means of ascertaining, confirming, or refuting the existence of a heaven or a hell it is clear man himself does not possess a trace. Not only do the various heavens and hells depend completely upon the mere *ipse dixit* of certain personages; these various institutions do not correspond with and corroborate each other even; on the contrary, they mutually falsify and exclude each other. From this fact we learn an important and significant lesson. If not all, certainly all but one of the many paradises and pandemoniums respectively are falsehoods and impositions; thus showing us that all but one each of these numerous institutions that have been so dangled before men are the product either of sheer effrontery, or the product of a desire to strengthen the receipt and practice by men of certain beliefs and modes of conduct by means of a very easy and obvious but supposed effective device. Our own impression is that we owe these interesting institutions to both of these causes; but chiefly to the latter. How Jesus' chief church has since evolved an intermediate place to which the name of purgatory has been given is not without instructiveness on this matter.

Upon such "evidence" as we possess for the existence of a heaven, we are strongly of opinion, Reader, that there is no real claim whatever upon any thoughtful man to make the slightest preparation, or supposed preparation therefor; and further, that no man in possession of unclouded reason is justified in devoting any portion of his time to such a purpose except, of course, so far as doing good here may be a preparation for a heaven.

What a bad security and rotten investment are the vast bulk of the preparations for another life which have been, and which are now being, made by our fellow men is very evident; and surely very touching and lamentable. All the celestial banks, with one exception at most, are insolvent and non-existent concerns; and the amount of treasures that our race have "laid up" for themselves therein is surely a very pitiable subject to reflect upon. Christianity may, it is true, be the solitary sound concern of this kind. But there is no disguising the fact that many species of even "Christian investment" are of highly uncertain validity. As between the chief Christian church and all the others, this very serious matter is made painfully plain by the former; all investments outside her pale are openly declared to be worthless. The many other alarming doubts and discords on this head in the remainder of the household of faith are too numerous to be referred to. The variety of Christian passports to the better land and the alarming doubts, suspicions, and open condemnations mutually declared by Christians themselves regarding them are most distressing.

The general truth of this statement is undoubted, though we have ourselves great faith in the ability of the human heart to embrace many objects of interest, and also to be quite unselfish and disinterested. But that our hearts and minds will be greatly with our projects, our possessions, and our objects of affection and of interest is manifest and is natural. A wife and children, for example, are the greatest treasures a man can possess, the greatest objects of interest and affection it is possible for a man to have; and that his heart will be with them, and his thoughts be for them, is as righteous as it is natural.

The entire drift and purpose of this verse as shown by what follows it, are that the laying up of treasures in heaven ought to receive the undivided thoughts and hearts of men; the perilous nature of all earthly concerns and interests being the moral and burden of the rest of this chapter. Paul, in one of his letters, also expounds the philosophy now before us by showing the spiritual danger of all earthly concernments, and points out upon the subject we have just referred to the dangerously distracting nature of marriage even in diverting the thoughts of men and women from the amassing of treasure in

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

heaven. "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world how she may please her husband." It is true Paul on this subject declares he is speaking for himself; "after my judgment." But he adds, "and I think also that I have the spirit of God." It is sincerely to be hoped that as regards some of Paul's very nauseous allusions to marriage they were his own "judgment" only. But in the particular passages we have quoted it is clear from what is now before us, that Paul was in harmony with Jesus himself.

How far—apart from monks and nuns—bachelors and spinsters are specially given to laying up treasure in heaven would be a curious inquiry. It may just be remarked that the testamentary dispositions of the latter, if not of the former, lend a good deal of support to the view that some celibates are much concerned for "the things of the Lord"; of which things, however, certain of our fellow men usually contrive to get the first benefit and advantage.

If a wife, a husband, and children be such diverters of the heart from heavenly things, it is obvious that in lesser degrees, the pursuit of wealth or other earthly ends, and the making of any mundane things whatever objects of affection and interest, must be so too. "Sell all thou hast, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" as practised by the first followers of Jesus is thus seen to be not only a very lucrative piece of barter in itself, but also a prudential discarding of highly dangerous mundane temptations.

It is scarcely necessary to attempt any detailed interpretation of the figures of speech Jesus here gave his hearers. Such expressions as a single eye and an evil eye inevitably mean pretty much what anyone may choose to think they mean. It is the drawback—or perhaps the advantage—of metaphors that they are extremely mercurial. It is best to leave each one to extract from these verses whatever good he can; and failing that, to ascribe to them whatever wisdom he feels disposed.

22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Here we have a verse that is clear and explicit enough. No

24 ¶ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

man, says Jesus, can serve two masters. It is perfectly true that in the complicated and multifarious arrangements of modern society many men serve two and often more than two masters, and serve them faithfully and well.

But if by two masters—as the last clause of this verse implies—be meant two who are in direct antagonism to each other, then such joint service is indeed a difficulty if not an impossibility. Those who may have the misfortune to be in the service of a quarrelling husband and wife, of two unfriendly brothers, or two alienated partners, know how difficult the accomplishment of the duty is even in such minor exemplifications of the task here named. Still the difficult task of serving and keeping friends with two adversaries is often essayed, and especially so in the case of the two named in the last part of the present verse.

“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” In spite of the impossibility pronounced by Jesus upon this feat it is astonishing to notice the extent to which it is now attempted. Since the days of Jesus and of his first followers fundamental changes in the attitude of Christianity to riches have taken place, and in our day an extremely friendly feeling often prevails between the two. The laying up of treasure in both worlds is now believed to be quite possible, and is thought to be very successfully accomplished by many wealthy Christians. The division of the heart between the two kinds of treasure certainly seems an awkward point. It seems a running counter to, and very like an open defiance of, Jesus’ own declarations, and also a complete disregard of the example of his first followers. To these apparently very formidable difficulties, however, there is now applied an “exegesis” thereof which not only obviates them but also ingeniously metamorphoses them into their opposites.

Hence, Reader, in face of what Jesus here so plainly lays down, in face even of the most alarming simile of the camel and the needle’s eye, Christians now pursue riches with a zest not exceeded by the children of this world. In this pursuit, so far as can be observed, the children of light and those of this world seem to be about equally successful; from which it seems natural to infer, contrary to what might have been expected, that the prince of this world does not intermeddle in these matters.

What is more surprising, perhaps, is that so far as observation goes, the hearts of Christians seem to be quite as much with their earthly treasures, quite as much glued thereto, as is the case with the non-elect. We are not forgetful of the generosity of many Christians; but except that it takes a religious direction, it is not more marked than the generosity of non-Christians. Pious bankers, brewers, and brokers, who have been exceptionally and magnificently successful in their pursuit of mammon often, it is true, build a church, restore a cathedral, or give a handsome-looking donation to the amiable missionaries who go out to upset other religions. Such munificent-looking acts, however, are easily seen to be exceedingly modest "sacrifices" and extremely fragmentary detachments from a large stock. And it must be confessed that instead of the remainder being sold and given to the poor it is held with a tenacity that bodes ill for the idea of a heart free from solicitude for treasure upon earth, and for the single eye which looks alone to treasure in heaven.

The sober truth is that in our times Christianity, not only on this but on other subjects likewise, has become quite a comfortable system. It now harmonizes itself with its environments of all kinds in a most amiable way, and adjusts itself to incongruities of all sorts, even to those discoveries of Science which it once thought, and which still look, so unfriendly to a large portion of its beliefs.

For such a course in regard to riches and other doubtful things it must be owned, in fairness to them, that Christians are not without divine sanction, strange as in view of what Jesus here sets forth, it may appear. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," is, we are sorry to say, likewise a command of their blessed Lord.

From this verse, Reader, to the end of the chapter there is set forth probably the most extraordinary moral teaching ever placed before mankind; teaching concerning which we shall, in fidelity to the one purpose of this work, proceed to write down our plain estimate and judgment. The rest of this chapter, then, appears to us to be

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

neither more nor less than a naked inculcation of indifference and improvidence; an exhortation to make light of or ignore some of the most clear and imperative of human duties,

and a glorification of a frame of mind which is as pernicious as it is contemptible. Moreover, we are convinced that these plain words would be the judgment of Christians themselves were the teaching now before us that of any one other than the Prophet of Nazareth.

“I say unto you take no thought for your life.” Is this good advice? Is it good sense? Does any one ever now enjoin it? Is this advice a good father would give his children? Finally, is not all worthy social effort an effort to inculcate the very contrary; a grappling with the frame of mind here lauded?

In the homes of Christians in the humbler ranks of life it is very common to see hung up on the walls certain texts and passages of scripture. It is needless to say that these texts are selected with much and necessary discretion. Much divine scripture so exhibited would indeed be startling. We are not now especially alluding to the large proportion which so displayed would raise a blush on many cheeks, and whose proper position if so hung would be with face to the wall. We allude to some very curious practical mottoes and sentiments and practical exhortations which might be—but which we need scarcely say are not—selected from the Psalms, the Proverbs, and also the Gospels and the Epistles—not to name the books of Moses and the Prophets—for this purpose. The most robust piety would give back on seeing these hung up for family study and use. And of this sermon on the mountain, not a little would, we think, be very generally and very justly regarded as “unsuitable” for such a purpose.

A reference to Christian commentaries shows us that it is often alleged that our authorized version has in this and some of the verses following been guilty of a mis-translation or rather an over-translation. The real meaning of the original in this place is, it is contended, not so much “Take no thought” as “Be not anxious or careful about.” This authorized version is so often an improvement of as well as a translation of the original that it would be little to be wondered at if in some few cases it may not also have done strict justice in an opposite sense. We leave to others better fitted the determination of the true meaning of the original in this place with the remark that no justifiable translation thereof would materially alter our estimate of the teaching here set before us.

It is, indeed, manifest that the so-called “original” is neither here nor elsewhere the true original of Jesus’ sermon. What

language Jesus actually used in addressing his sermon to these people cannot be stated, and has been much discussed. That it was not Greek we may be very sure, unless we assume concurrent supernatural illumination of these auditors.

We are, of course, quite aware of the Christian hypothesis that after his death, and some forty years after his actual delivery of this sermon, Jesus dictated it, or portions of it, in Greek to the two divine penmen to whom we owe our possession of it. According to this theory we are, or ought to be, in possession of carefully revised and strictly accurate versions of this sermon furnished by Jesus himself. If this be so, a comparison of these two accounts of it reveals to us the amazingly latitudinarian character of celestial dictation. The divergencies, transpositions, and contradictions of these Gospels become surely very painful when regarded in such a light. That Jesus "dictated" his two genealogies and the four accounts of his resurrection is a theory these Gospels themselves, indeed, nowhere allege; it is a mere allegation of theologians, and one which for ourselves we respectfully but utterly decline.

The fixation from amongst a mass of diverging manuscripts of the "original" of holy scripture, and the necessary translations of it into modern languages are a sufficiently curious subject of contemplation. Putting out of thought the former of these difficulties, the disputations that have raged in accomplishing the latter—as shown in the marvellous performances of rival theologians upon such phrases as "everlasting" punishment and others of vital import—are surely calculated to disquiet us.

For a very small and a very amiable and natural offence, indeed for no real offence at all, Jesus once thought fit to confuse what had up to that time been the one language of our race. This confusion has since remained, and, by the evolution of our own and other modern languages, been added to. For our part we are unable to see that celestial unreasonableness is one whit more admirable or excusable than our own, and it seems not unfitting that the divine scriptures should, along with other things, have suffered as they have done from the deliberate confusing of human speech.

"Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?" Yes, this is quite true. But it is none the less true that our lives would soon come to an end without meat, and that our bodies, not to speak of other objections, would soon give us much trouble of

another kind if we did not take the thought and trouble to provide ourselves with raiment. The life is more than meat, but meat is essential to life. Then where in this curious argument does indifference to the provision of what is necessary to life come in? If Jesus had made our lives not to need meat and our bodies not to require raiment his argument would have been clearly conclusive.

There is very little in these Gospels in the nature of direct reasoning and argumentation. Seldom is the human intellect appealed to. We have to own, Reader, that the few specimens of celestial logic offered do not favourably impress us. Any awe they inspire in us is solely due to the suspicion they raise as to the validity of sound human logic on account of the little resemblance between that and the divine.

“Behold the fowls of the air.” Yes, behold them. For a better

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

refutation of the poor philosophy here propounded could not be wished for than that given by these very birds. The care and the ingenuity, and above all, the industry with which these very birds devote themselves to the task of supplying their wants are an

example which is as elevating as it is beautiful. The way, for instance, in which these birds of the air lay their plans and set about building their nests; the way in which, day by day, and straw by straw, often brought from far away, these structures are patiently and industriously put together; and the way in which, after all these preparations and toils are ended, these little homes are watched and guarded, all display to us an amount of care, of toil and of foresight that is quite touching. And if it be true that they do not sow, the way in which these birds reap and gather their gleanings and often store them up, and the assiduity they use, and are compelled to use, in finding the foods they need, afford examples of forethought and industry that could not easily be exceeded. But, above all, the thorough absorption of these birds in all these processes is most to be remarked. And yet, Reader, these are the models of unconcern held up by Jesus for human imitation! Never, surely, was a more unfortunate illustration set before men than this.

Proceeding, Jesus claims that it is the heavenly Father who feeds these birds. Whatever may be the truth or otherwise of this

statement in an ultimate sense, it is decidedly best not to follow it out too closely. It is true of these birds, as of all animated things, that God helps those who help themselves. And it is as true of them, as of all living things, that, in spite of every effort they themselves can make, they are often after all left to perish of hunger. In a more general sense, the feeding processes at work in animated Nature offer a spectacle best left undwelt upon. The way in which one of these birds, bearing in its mouth the far-borne food for its little ones, becomes the prey of, and is made to "feed," some stealthy and cruel member of the carnivora, and the way in which by consequence the young nestlings are left by heaven to pine to death, are a subject of contemplation that cannot be recommended. Many of the "feeding" arrangements at work in Nature seem much more like the devices of the personage known by the name of the Prince of this World than the benevolent adaptations of a heavenly Father.

What are we really to think of the celestial ratiocination here proffered to us? We cannot, by "taking thought," accomplish a given thing which is not only impossible to us, but also entirely undesirable. Then why take thought about things which we can accomplish, and which are also desirable and even necessary?

In the third Gospel version of this part of this sermon the singular query given in the present verse is followed by another. "If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow," &c.

It may be observed that an alternative translation of the "original" of the present verse much preferred by many is, instead of the addition of a cubit to the stature, an addition of a span to life. This latter, however, is usually supposed to be quite a result within the competence of the taking of human thought. The prolongation of life by change of climate, medical skill, and other forms of the taking of thought, is believed to be often a result that would not have occurred had the taking thought in question been omitted. Vital statistics seem to demonstrate that heaven's summons to human souls is considerably hastened and delayed by surrounding circumstances. It is, too, we think, pleasant to reflect that, unlike the early Christians who sought martyrdom, the Christians of our day wish to remain with us as

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

long as possible, and take all known steps to delay the divine summons to join the heavenly host.

“And why take ye thought for raiment?” Dealing with the subject of clothing, Jesus appeals to his hearers to consider the lilies of the field how they grow, and how they neither toil nor spin.

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin:

It must be admitted that the vegetable kingdom is a field which offers more suitable,

or at any rate less adverse, illustrations of the philosophy Jesus is here advocating than that of the animal kingdom. But if man is to seek exemplars amongst flowers, trees, and vegetables, he will be somewhat distracted with the many varieties thus offered. And we think that if in consequence of contemplating a lily of the field and observing how it neither toils nor spins, he comes to the conclusion that he will neither toil nor spin himself, he will make a very foolish deduction.

Judging, too, from the punishment inflicted by Jesus upon a certain fig-tree for not having even abnormally early fruit, one would almost come to the conclusion that if trees do not toil and spin and exert themselves they ought to do so.

The way in which contemporary Christians “interpret” their Master’s teaching concerning the taking of thought regarding clothing is—as in so many other cases—a very singular one. Any one who will observe Christians as they make their way to, or depart from, their varying churches on a “sabbath” day, will, we fear, be driven to the conclusion that not only much but excessive thought has been bestowed upon their raiment. The elaborate and costly dresses then displayed to our gaze are a practical exegesis of the Master’s sayings which leaves even the theoretical achievements of theologians in the same line quite out-distanced. Paul’s very specific prohibitions on this matter, too, are set at nought by Christian women in a way which seems to show their sympathy with the system of “wider” meanings as drawn from, or rather applied to, divine scripture now so popular on other subjects.

Concerning the lilies just named Jesus grows eloquent and declares to his auditors that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. As a matter of fact this statement need not be doubted. For ourselves we have so high an estimate

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

of the glory of flowers generally, and so poor an estimate

of all the glory of Solomon, that we find no difficulty in the declaration. But it must have sounded to these auditors, presuming they were pious Jews, something very like a severe sarcasm upon the elaborate pomp of the Psalmist's son.

The only name honoured by mention in this sermon on the mount is that of Solomon. How Solomon, the son of the Psalmist and of "her of Urias," was an ancestor of Jesus, our author points out to us in his first chapter. In spite of this fact we are obliged to declare that a name less fitted to adorn a moral discourse, or to appear therein unless for purposes of contrast, could not well have been selected. Even had the personal character of that celebrity been better and cleaner than it was, his writings—if those ascribed to him be his—are about as little elevating as any we know. Alternately lamentational and bacchanalian, they are consistently pessimistic in the worst sense of the term; and in the main antipodally opposite in their import to most of the teachings inculcated in this sermon.

"Wherefore." Jesus now sums up and gives his hearers the

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

result of the strange reasoning they had just been listening to; reasoning and a conclusion which may well have contributed to the fact of which we are apprised at the end of this sermon, that the people were astonished at his

doctrine. For the result of Jesus' argument is simply this—If God feed the fowls of the air without any sowing, reaping, or gathering on their part, and if he clothe the lilies and grass of the field without any toiling or spinning on their part, will he not, Jesus asks his hearers, much more feed and clothe them without their taking thought for meat or raiment?

Well, Reader, might these hearers ask themselves, and well may we ask ourselves the question, Will God or does God do all this for us? To which we are obliged to answer No; and to further state that unless man takes great thought for meat and forraiment, unless he sows, reaps, gathers into barns, and unless he toils a great deal and spins a great deal he will find himself without both food and clothing.

We live, happily, in times when many ingenious inventions of man's own, not known in the time of Jesus, and which are due to man's having taken great thought, have resulted in making our food and our raiment much surer to us than they were in times past. Still there are many who yet suffer from an insufficiency of

both. In most cases this is due to acting upon the advice here given by taking no thought and by being insufficiently anxious about the provision of food and clothing. But in many cases an insufficiency of both food and raiment exists after great thought and toil have been taken to secure them; and it is not apparent when this grievous event happens to those who trust in God in what way the deficiency is made good. Well, indeed, may we repeat the question, Will God clothe people who take no thought for raiment?

So far as can be traced, the ideas enunciated by the Prophet of Nazareth on this as on other important subjects are in no way corroborated by Nature, or by Nature's supposed Author. If we do not take much thought for food and clothing we shall soon find ourselves without both; and if we then trust in God to give it we shall find ourselves ignored in a way that, it must be owned, we should well deserve.

"O ye of little faith." Jesus early began to upbraid men for their possession of so little faith; a lament he had to continue to the end. This, indeed, seems to have ever been the chronic condition of our race: a condition which we find greatly grieved and troubled all religious founders. Happy would it have been as regards all the varied religions of the world—and we are sorry we cannot conscientiously make an exception in favour of that of the Prophet of Nazareth—if that little faith had been still less.

"Therefore take no thought." Jesus having pointed out how, in accordance with the preceding reasoning, God may be relied upon to see to our food and clothing, it becomes obvious that concern and solicitude thereabout on man's part are superfluous. If we accept the "wherefore" of the last verse the "therefore" of the present is manifestly sound logic and an inevitable deduction.

"For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." A more ill-timed reference, a more infelicitous taunt than that contained in these words could not in our judgment, Reader, be conceived. Poor Gentiles! Their failings, doubtless, were many. But to have the finger of scorn pointed to them in an address to a company of Jews by one who, as pertaining to the flesh, was a Jew also, as a warning against too keen a concern for, and pursuit of,

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

worldly things seems quite a last straw. Indeed the ludicrous aspect of this allusion overcomes any other. For a company of Israelites to be cautioned against the pursuit of earthly goods by the sad example of the Gentiles is indeed diverting.

What particular qualities in the Jewish race led our Creator to entertain such a peculiar fondness therefor, and as we know led him to become even a Jew in the flesh himself, has always been a mystery. But of one thing we may be quite sure, and that is that it was not because of any lofty indifference to earthly things observable in that nationality. For a Gentile teacher to have warned Gentiles against the search for worldly things by pointing to the example of the Jews would have had no little appropriateness and force.

The marked and historic fondness for shekels which has ever characterized the children of the circumcision still characterizes those Israelites we are so happy as yet to have amongst us Gentiles. The peculiar way in which that traditional fondness has twined itself around Gentile coins of all descriptions is quite touching. The image and superscription of Cæsar, as we shall see, greatly troubled the pious Jews of Jesus' time. But the images and superscriptions on the coins of the republics and kingdoms of our day give no trouble to, but are highly appreciated by the Israel of the present.

Looked at from another point of view this slighting reference to the Gentiles does not seem in very good taste, Reader. The divine light and divine scripture had not been vouchsafed to these Gentiles; the children's bread had not yet been cast to them. Then what were these Gentiles to seek after? They had, it is true, their varied religions, but they were all false; any treasures these Gentiles might lay up in their heavens—and many, and great, and varied were their efforts to do this—were all of necessity laid up in bogus elysiums. Under these circumstances devotion to mundane good seems excusable and even wise. Happily for the world, many noble Gentiles had devoted themselves to seek after wisdom, and art, and knowledge; and in that glorious search had produced imperishable works which mankind yet prize and treasure, and which will, we believe, continue to be treasured and prized after holy writs of all the many kinds have been forgotten.

Jesus adds that "your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." It is clear by the nature of the

hypothesis itself that a heavenly Father is perfectly cognizant of these and of all other needs of man and of all other sentient creatures. But bitter experience shows us that such cognizance in no way implies a satisfaction of such needs, either in spiritual or material things. The appalling spiritual neglect for thousands of years of the Gentiles just so feelingly referred to shows us how little man's need implies Heaven's attention. And as we have remarked already, the sieges of Christian cities, and endless other illustrations, show us that Christian hunger, like other human or other animal privation, cannot in any way regard divine knowledge thereof as any guarantee of alleviation.

Putting things, therefore, in their order of real importance, Jesus

33 But seek ye first
the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness;
and all these things
shall be added unto you.

bids his hearers first of all to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Having done this—having found, or, at least, having sought the kingdom in question—all the lesser, though necessary material things to which so much reference has just been made, will, says Jesus, “be added unto you.”

The kingdom of God is obviously, by the very terms of the phrase, a desirable object of human search. It seems a pity, and also surprising, that it should need anything in the nature of a search in order to be discovered. It seems to be an instinctive human feeling that such a kingdom should, and would, be so conspicuous, so clear, so bright, as to be utterly incapable of being confused, doubted, or mistaken by men.

Alas, Reader, not to mention other men, even Christians themselves have never, from the very first up to this present, ceased to dispute and to quarrel—and have often even fought—about this same kingdom; and in a languid way continue to do so yet. Nor, though Jesus bids these hearers seek the kingdom of God, does he tell them how to find it. We now, of course, know that Jesus himself is the only way to that kingdom. But when we reflect upon the strange reticence here and so long afterwards preserved by Jesus as to his Christship, it is not discernible how these hearers were to find the concealed key to heaven's kingdom.

“All these things shall be added unto you.” The many and immense promises made to his believers by Jesus in these Gospels are a very striking feature thereof. How faith to the amount of a mustard seed in extent will cast mountains into the sea; how “all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall

receive;" how belief would enable men to do greater things than he himself had done; how even in such purely material things as handling serpents and drinking deadly things with safety Christian believers were to be wonderfully endowed, we are duly apprised in these Gospels. It is quite true that other religious founders were big promisers also, but none of them, we think, quite equalled the Prophet of Nazareth on this head.

Hence we see that to seekers for, or finders of, the kingdom of God, "all these things" were to be added. Observation shows us that for some reason or other many of the huge promises of Jesus are not operative with existing Christians. And in the case of the promise now before us it is extremely difficult to discern any intelligible workings of it. In the case of rich Christians, the truly lavish way in which all these things have been added unto them is evident enough. But the extremely parsimonious manner in which all these things have been added unto other Christians; not to name the way in which so many have, like the non-elect, been made to suffer want, renders a study of this curious promise a very bootless and unsatisfactory one.

In support of the poor and, in our estimate, most pernicious teaching here given to his hearers, Jesus adduces two reasons; reasons which would be more correctly termed excuses. The first of these is that "for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Had this ignoble argument been used by any one else, Christians would rightly have adjudged it unworthy of refutation. That it was spoken by Jesus does not, to us at least, alter its real value one iota.

If men will adopt this advice and let the morrow deal with its own affairs; if they will discard the censured habit of thinking and pondering to-day of what shall be done to-morrow; if instead of plowing and sowing they will consider the lilies and how these grow without any toil; if men will cease to plan and scheme for the morrow—they will certainly soon discover the wisdom and profundity of this celestial advice. But even in a minor sense, where is the gain, where is the saving of thought, by the process here recommended? The thought is to be taken after all; and when to-morrow's things are left until to-morrow to be thought about, bitter experience shows what an increased amount of thought is then required, and how ineffective even such increased

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

amount then really is. It is precisely by thinking of to-morrow's affairs in advance that a saving of thought is effected.

To take great thought not only for the actual to-morrow, but also for the more distant future still, and to manfully resolve that so far as in us lies we will mould that future and make it what it ought to be, are the great and the ennobling duties of all good men.

A second reason or plea assigned by Jesus against the practice of concerning ourselves for the morrow is an extremely singular one. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," says Jesus. It must be acknowledged that such an admission on the part of the voluntary Creator of our world and the omniscient foreseer of all the occurrences therein is an exceedingly candid one. Few will be disposed to deny that the daily evil in our world is quite sufficient. How far an adoption of Jesus' recommendation would lessen the sum-total of daily evil is a query on which much thought need not be bestowed. It is a belief as inspiring as it is just that by his own foresight and forethought; by the exercise of thrift, of providence, and the making provision for and the anticipation of the needs of even a distant future; and by planning and taking much thought concerning not only the coming morrow, but the coming years, man has lessened, does lessen, and will yet more and more lessen the evil he has been so plentifully left to encounter.

MATTHEW VII.

CHRISTIAN expositors differ considerably in their expoundings of

CHAPTER VII.

1 Christ ending his sermon in the mount, reproveth rash judgment, 6 forbiddeth to cast holy things to dogs, 7 exhorteth to prayer, 13 to enter in at the strait gate, 15 to beware of false prophets, 21 not to be hearers, but doers of the word: 24 like houses builded on a rock, 26 and not on the sand.

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

this dictum of the Master. The literal meaning of the phrase cannot be entertained. To consider, weigh, and judge the actions and conduct of our fellow-men are not only just and proper, but also obligatory. Whether we wish to do so or not, we are bound to consider and approve or disapprove the actions of those around us. We also feel that others must also form their opinions and their estimates of ourselves, and that in so doing they are acting in a perfectly just and sensible manner. Men's

actions, our own included, excite our like and dislike, our praise and our condemnation, whether we will or not. And from the most momentous decisions of our lives down to the details of everyday life we are compelled to feel and to give effect to the approbation or disapprobation courses of conduct on the part of ourselves and of others excite in us.

Literal compliance with this injunction being an impossibility, what was it that Jesus meant men to understand thereby? A problem which the Prophet of Nazareth not seldom left to the solution of his followers.

Some of those followers say we ought to carry out this injunction as far as possible by, if not ignoring, yet by abstaining from sitting in judgment upon the conduct of others, by withholding the expression of the feelings that conduct may produce in us, and by leaving judgment entirely to heaven itself. This is a view but few would adopt and need not be dwelt upon. For apart from the fact that the praise and censure of our fellows are potent and on the whole very salutary influences as encouragements to good and deterrents from evil, the stifling of our judgments or the expression of them thus enjoined is neither candid nor wholesome, and has a great deal of hollowness in it.

The general exposition of this exhortation of Jesus is that in forbidding judgment of others he really meant harsh, hasty, and unfair judgment. This saying of Jesus is thus, as in so many other instances, simultaneously converted into good sense and into a very tame platitude. The proscription of a useful and necessary function by way of enjoining a proper exercise of that function does not seem a very brilliant or promising way of making for the latter object.

As if to at once stultify the injunction just given, Jesus proceeds to declare that we shall ourselves be judged precisely as we exercise that just proscribed faculty towards others. If we judge others fairly, justly, and charitably, we shall be thus judged ourselves, and *vice versâ*. But in what way this supports the proposition that we are not to judge at all is not discernible; indeed it seems a very forcible reason why we should train the function in question and exercise it with great care and thought and deliberation. That we should judge others charitably and mercifully as well as righteously is a proposition all men would

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

assent to. That we should not judge others at all is a proposition at once impossible and undesirable.

With the inconsistency which was in truth one of the most noticeable of his characteristics, Jesus thus proclaims and upholds that very *lex talionis* he has just been denouncing. He assures us that upon that ancient but censured principle heaven itself intends to act. Our judgment of others, be it what it may, just or unjust, true or false, harsh or considerate, hasty or careful, will be precisely re-enacted upon us.

The nature of Justice is an old problem. Long before Jesus came into the world it had been discussed by philosophers at great length; and the rough and ready principle of measure for measure here held up by Jesus as that of heaven itself had been much debated, its merits and its demerits, its strong and its weak points fully entered into. Neither stern retaliation nor the antipodal absolute sponging out of offences seems to us a very high or admirable ideal. The tempering of strict justice with mercy is the ideal good men set before themselves, and in modern administrations of justice it is an ideal that to a large extent is, we think, successfully aimed at.

Like the metaphor of straining at a gnat and swallowing a

camel used by Jesus later on, this imagery of having a beam in one's own eye and yet perceiving a small splinter in the eye of another, was a phrase or proverb then current, and both were expressions evidently thought to make up in force what they obviously lacked in taste.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye.

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

To first cleanse our own ways before reproaching another is doubtless good advice, advice even then as venerable as good.

But the shutting of our eyes to the failings, if grave ones, of others, or the shutting of their eyes to our own failings, is in no way to be commended. "Why beholdest thou?" The answer to this query is simple enough. It is because observing and pointing out to each other our respective shortcomings is far and away the likeliest known way of their being got rid of on both sides. And if any one has a beam in his eye and is not conscious of it or considers it not, it is quite time a brother or some one else apprised him of the fact. Indeed, such pointing out by

brother to brother in a kind and gentle way is exactly what wise and sensible brothers both would and should do. And not brothers only, but also friends and all well-wishers. Nor should consciousness of failings of our own in the slightest degree prevent the discharge of this duty. Our own weaknesses and faults may be, and often are, quite other than those of our brother, our friend, and our neighbour; and it is very desirable that we should give each other mutually the advice and the expostulation we may severally need.

There is, no doubt, especially with small, inferior natures, much ungenerous and often unjust fault-finding; and so far as these observations of Jesus may be and help to be condemnatory thereof well and good. Like so many other human actions, criticism is good and is bad entirely according to the purpose for which and the spirit in which it is made.

In the last Gospel we read how in the case of a woman taken in the act of adultery Jesus bade only those themselves without sin to cast a stone at her. It is not desirable to stone adulterers or any one else; and in countermanding that method of proceeding to such and to other offenders which he had once enjoined, Jesus is much to be applauded. But a woman taken in the act of adultery ought to be reproached by somebody; and as there has never been more than one faultless human being, it is necessary for people who are not themselves altogether without sins to undertake such bounden duty. The sentimentalism which tells us that we must not point out and denounce wrong-doing in others because we are not ourselves spotless is but a poor burlesque upon the real virtue of considerateness and of mercy, and at the same time upon the virtue of modesty also.

What Jesus meant his hearers and means us to understand by

6 ¶ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

“that which is holy” and by “your pearls,” and whom or what by dogs and swine, it is indeed hard to make out. As men do not give holy things to dogs nor offer pearls to swine in any natural sense, it is manifest that such terms

must have some inner and hidden meanings. These inner and spiritual meanings theologians accordingly extract; at great length, with great ingenuity, but, unhappily, with perplexing diversity also.

The most general explication is to the effect that by that which

is holy religious truth, or knowledge, or privilege, is meant; by your pearls, divine wisdom or true human wisdom; and that by dogs and swine degraded human beings are referred to, or otherwise the evil passions and tendencies found in human beings are thus alluded to. But is not Christianity understood to especially address itself to the fallen and degraded?

Further on, we shall find Jesus forbidding the children's bread to be thrown to dogs under circumstances that render his meaning quite clear on that occasion. What the more general proposition here laid down was intended to convey seems very uncertain. As there is no urgent need for this verse to be deciphered it seems best to leave it unexplained.

Jesus now exhorts his hearers to ask, to seek, and to knock; such petitions, as we learn from what follows, to be addressed to their Father in heaven. In all ages, before this time as since, men have copiously acted upon this advice; immeasurable volumes of prayer and supplication have gone up to heaven from human lips. It is true that the great bulk of this supplication and "much speaking" has been in connexion with false religions. But that has clearly been the misfortune, not the fault, of such supplicants.

It certainly appears to mortals that the paucity of true prayer, and the copious quantity of false which have ever been sent up to heaven from our race, cannot but have been painful to Jesus and his Father. Even now but a slender proportion of the prayers sent up to heaven are to Jesus, taking even as valid all that proceeds from the very varied "household" of Christian faith; though the strained relations and mutual suspicions prevailing in that household, and the not seldom openly and mutually hostile prayer sent up therefrom, make it impossible to see how the whole of it can possibly be agreeable to Jesus.

Jesus goes on to assure his listeners that "every one that asketh receiveth;" that the seeker finds; and that to the knocker it is opened. The necessity Jesus has so often placed upon his theologians of qualifying his own statements is here very patent; and the many conditions precedent which those learned and pious men lay before us as essential to the securing of the promises here given are undoubtedly trying and discouraging.

7 ¶ Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

These conditions we are told were implied by Jesus, but, unhappily, according to a practice very common to him, not stated.

Indeed, much mystery undoubtedly hangs over this willingness of the Father in heaven to give good things to them that ask him. The obvious fact that good things are constantly being prayed for by good men, and yet not granted by the Father which is in heaven, is a very sorrowful fact. This non-response to good men's prayers for good things has greatly exercised theologians, and they provide us with a great variety of explanations intended to obviate the difficulty. The good man is not as good as he might be; he is wanting in faith at the time of prayer; the good things he prays for are not really good—this is a very dangerous plea; the things are good, but the time for them has not yet arrived; these and many others are the reasons tendered to us for heaven's non-compliance with so many of the excellent prayers sent up thereto. Of the soundness of these pleas we will offer no opinion. All we can say is that, if true, they show that the qualifications of Jesus' original statement, "For every one that asketh receiveth," thus shown to be needed, are very discouraging. How often, alas! is this the case with those statements!

In these latter ages men, and especially the better types of our species, have relied much less upon prayer and much more upon themselves. In these later times man has asked, sought, and knocked, and has received, found, and opened. But it has not been from heaven, but from Nature. The glorious discoveries and achievements of these latter centuries have not come from prayer, but from the labour and the study of man himself. The long and dreary ages of faith and prayer may prove to be rich in heavenly fruits. But they were dismally barren of any useful results here.

In support and in illustration of their heavenly Father's willingness to give men good things, Jesus asks his hearers which of them will give his son a stone when he asks for bread, or a serpent if he asks for fish; or, as added in the third Gospel, a scorpion if he asks an egg. This is an analogy

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

and a line of argument that must not be pressed home; that require, indeed, a very delicate and dainty application. The good things that heaven gives the human race are much mixed with things of another kind; and blessings and enlightenments are

withheld by heaven that would not be withheld by any good man from his son.

It also appears that this gift of good things from the heavenly Father needs much importuning. For in the version of this portion of this "sermon" found in the third Gospel, the verses we are now dealing with are preceded by the following passage: "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight and say unto him, Friend lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given;" seek, &c. Though the comparisons contained in this simile, and that involved in the very similar parable of the unjust judge, also given in that third Gospel, are not very flattering to Jehovah, the "moral" of both illustrations is certainly clear enough. Our heavenly Father, like our earthly one, can be sometimes got to give way by dint of repeated importunings.

Continuing his argument, Jesus asks his hearers if they, "being evil," have the kindness and intelligence not to give their sons stones and serpents in place of bread and fish, "how much more" will the heavenly Father give good things when asked. The third Gospel version of this verse gives it, "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?" Which of the two versions of this saying was the one actually used by Jesus cannot be determined. But it is clear that spiritual gifts are the only ones now specially given to true believers by the heavenly Father, inasmuch as the possession by believers of any other kinds of "good things" is not greater than that of non-believers and non-prayers.

The point of this "therefore," as of some other therefore we meet with in these Gospels, is not very apparent. As connecting the maxim which follows it with the verses and the reasoning which precede it, this "therefore" needs very careful, not to say cautious, contemplation; for the idea that Jehovah

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

does to others as he would wish to be done to, would, we suppose, be regarded as somewhat irreverent—though why, it would not be easy to say.

The famous apothegm found in this verse affords a striking illustration of the glamour which religious feeling and prepossessions can throw over the plainest and simplest things. This maxim was long regarded and spoken of as a manifestly divine profundity; as peculiarly and distinctively Jesus' own; and on that account, more probably, than on account of its own inherent merits, it has received the title of the golden rule. But this golden rule was in the world long before Jesus of Nazareth came to it. Indeed, the many who had given expression to this maxim previously to Jesus shows that so far from the thought and the sentiment contained in this adage being profound, they were in truth obvious and conspicuous. The great prophet of China had laid down this rule many centuries before Jesus. It was enunciated by the great Stagyrte. And in varying forms, both axiomatic and otherwise, it may be met with in many ancient writings. Curiously enough, the amiable Hillel had not only laid down this very maxim, but also even the additional remark here made by Jesus, that the principle in question was the sum and essence of the law. In the view that the Mosaic law was based upon the principle of this maxim, it is possible to concur only with large reservations; large portions of the Mosaic code being based upon a principle of odious and selfish exclusiveness and of unfeeling treatment of others, which is not far from an approach to the antithesis of the aphorism before us. At the same time it is perfectly true that all wise and just law is an expression of the idea of this maxim; a recognition of the restraints and the obligations mutually due from ourselves to others, and from others to ourselves.

In the wording of this exhortation, Jesus seems to have specially intended to exclude all limitations and qualifications of the rule. "All things whatsoever" is as universal and exceptionless as it is possible for language to be. The only restriction consistent with the rule as here laid down, is the circumscription of our own wishes of what others should do to us which we may voluntarily impose upon ourselves, and thus correspondingly limit what we feel called upon to do to others ourselves. Nothing can be clearer than the numerous practical qualifications necessary to prevent this golden rule from becoming practical quixotism and actual absurdity.

The real value of this golden maxim, as of many other amiable adages and proverbs of a like kind, is the aid it may afford in cultivating sympathy with others—a pre-eminently desirable object amongst mankind. To put ourselves in the place of others; to realize as far as we can their beliefs, convictions, and purposes; to enter into their feelings, their hopes, and their fears, is most salutary to us in every way; and not least because it is eminently truth-promoting.

The fierce antipathies, the bigotries, and the deductions that our own consciousness is proof of the truth of our beliefs, which led to the endless asperities of the past, and which, even less than three centuries ago, led men to the appalling cruelties then inflicted, arose from this want of projecting ourselves into the places of others. And though the mild conflicts and softened controversies of these latter times leave little to be wished for as regards outward form, there is still unquestionably great room for more real appreciation and sympathy amongst men.

So great, however, has been the growth amongst men in these latter times of the social and altruistic spirit in all its forms; so great has been the replacement of rivalry and competition by mutual and co-operative processes; and so great are the further changes in the like direction clearly impending, that some good thinkers have raised a warning voice as to the wisdom and necessity of preserving and honouring the self-regarding feelings and instincts of our race. The revelations of Evolution that competition results in the survival of the fittest are dwelt upon as showing that that process cannot be dispensed with amongst mankind.

It is good and proper that such considerations should be pointed out. The motive-power supplied by self-interest, and the real benefits of the various competitive processes are too clear to be denied. But these thinkers do not recommend us to go back to any of the happily discarded human rivalries that have been dispensed with; and in what has yet been done, or is likely soon to be done, in this altruistic direction, we have not reached a point where any of the forms of self-regard that are really worth preserving have been at all jeopardized.

Even if survival of the fittest meant survival of the best and the highest, which we are far from being sure is the case altogether, we entirely decline to recognize the processes of Nature to that end

as standards for human imitation. But apart from such a consideration, the history of the substitution of the principle of mutuality for that of selfishness amongst men has abundantly shown that the methods of Nature are capable in this respect of being greatly improved upon. Many of Nature's doings are execrable; and if the sad spectacle shown in animated Nature ends in a satisfactory outcome, that is no proof that Nature's methods to that end are either the only ones or the best ones. The coming triumphs of mutuality over the principle of every man for himself, will show the great gain therefrom as clearly as past triumphs of a like kind have done. Whether it is better for each man to be selfish, taking into account his own gain therefrom and his losses from the selfishness of others, or it is better for each to limit his own self-seeking and benefit from that limitation in others, is a problem the main answer to which experience shows us there is no possible doubt of.

Some of the transitions from subject to subject in this sermon

13 ¶ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

are extremely sudden; and unless we suppose there to have been some connecting thoughts and links not here reported, hearers must have felt their minds and thoughts appealed to in a somewhat unpleasantly abrupt manner.

Jesus here bids his hearers enter in at "the strait gate." It is not apparent how these hearers were to discover where this strait gate was, nor how it was to be got through. We, of course, now know that Jesus himself is this gate; that he is the only way, the sole avenue, that leads to life. But it is not evident how these people could ascertain this. Apart from the doubtful question whether the atonement effected by Jesus some three years after this operated retrospectively, it is quite certain these hearers were not aware they were listening to the Christ; for long after this that vital fact was forbidden by Jesus to be disclosed to any man. How these particular people were to discover and get through this strait gate, however, is but a small matter compared with the general question here raised. How the myriads of human beings who lived in the thousands of years before the Christian plan of redemption was effected could possibly find salvation and the strait gate leading thereto is, indeed, one of the mysteries, and one of the painful features, of the Christian scheme which no suggestions yet offered on the point in any way explain or assuage. But it is not necessary

to dwell upon this aspect of the subject, grave and most sorrowful as it seems to be. The straitness of the gate that has led to life during the past eighteen and a half centuries, and the few who have found it and entered it are of themselves a sufficiently oppressive and melancholy object of contemplation.

It would have been interesting to have had some reason given for the straitness of the gate and narrowness of the way that lead to life. Strait gates and narrow ways are not in themselves either beautiful or admirable. Broad ways, good roads, and wide gates are certainly in themselves better and nobler things than their opposites. Unhappily, as is often the case in other instances, the "for" and the "because" here used by Jesus do not throw any light whatever upon the subject.

The gate and the road to destruction, says Jesus, are wide ones. As a natural consequence many go in thereat. Where the responsibility rests for this most deplorable fact, seems a very open question. Pious disputants try to throw this responsibility upon man himself, but make out a very poor case against him. The admitted fact that this unhappy state of things is the work of the great Enemy of mankind in the first instance is an explanation, but only a proximate one. The exoneration of Omnipotence on this matter is the real task theologians have before them; a task which, as with the defence of the thesis of the authorship of Nature by a good and almighty being, can only be effected by the interception and arrest of human reason at some intermediate link or other in the chain of argumentation, or by the hoisting of the flag of inscrutability.

Be the explanation what it may, the width of the gate and the breadth of the way leading to religious destruction are most regrettable; and it is not discernible how men up to this time could possibly escape them. For how even could those noble thinkers and truth-seekers who lived many centuries before Jesus, and whose works are yet with us, written in the very language used by this Gospel, if not by Jesus himself—how could even these men ever have discovered the strait gate and narrow way that lead to life? Mankind, it is true, had never been wanting in volunteer guides who offered to show and lead men into the pathway to life and bliss. The multiplicity of these guides, indeed, was an aggravation of the difficulty; for though in these later ages it has been a common fashion to regard the great creed-

makers with much leniency and even partial approbation, does not Jesus expressly tell us that all who came before himself were thieves and robbers? And have not those of the same kind who have come since been so also?

Having thus declared the breadth of the way leading men to destruction, Jesus goes on to declare the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way that lead to life; adding the appalling statement "and few there be that find it."

14 Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

It must be owned that a very strait gateway and a very narrow road will accommodate the "heirs of salvation." Whether those heirs were intended, as some Christians think, or were not intended, as other Christians maintain, to be so, it is very palpable that they are a very slender minority of our species. In this respect the true religion resembles the false ones. The adherents of any given religious faith are a small minority of our race; and the net result of Christianity, as of every other system, is the salvation of the few and the destruction of the many. How any real love to mankind can be recognized in a scheme of salvation having such a result is only discernible to the eye of faith. And few things in our world are more truly odious than the half-sneering pity with which the adherents of one creed and scheme regard the adherents of another, and often even the adherents of sub-divisions of their own.

Every day, Reader, 65,000 human souls leave our planet *en route* to heaven and to hell. The proportions wending their way to each of those destinations,—the few and the many,—are such as to appal the hardest heart, to make us groan and bewail the very existence of our race.

Whence the 75,000 little souls that arrive here daily come, even theologians do not seem to know. But this we know; that if any religion whatever be true it would have been better for the vast bulk of those little creatures had they never alighted on our earth.

This daily flight of that vast array of human ghosts is made up from Iceland and from Africa, from Mexico and from Japan; made up of those who have breathed their last in the faiths of endless jarring creeds, and with no creed at all. Whilst the good Christian may rejoice as he thinks of the few who daily augment the redeemed and swell the volume of hallelujahs to Jehovah and

the Lamb, may we not ask him, Reader, to spare a sigh, if not a tear, for the many who daily wend their way to the everlasting fire into which the Prophet of Nazareth has announced his intention of placing them ?

We hear much of the comfort and solace of a religious belief. Nor is there any reason to doubt the fact. The soothing and the blissful anticipation which every creed can give to its true votary is sufficiently obvious ; though it is confessedly mixed, even in the most confident and complacent of devotees, with much anxiety and disquietude. And the rude awakening which awaits repositors in false faiths and misbelievers in the true one, is of itself very lamentable to think of.

But the solace of a religious belief is purely personal and individual. Dark beyond measure to every humane man must his own faith feel to be as a whole ; and profoundly must every gentle and thoughtful man hope that his own faith, like every other, may prove to be unfounded. That every religion is untrue is a happy and a glorious belief, for which every true religious believer who is a true man would be willing to exchange the puny and selfish solace his own creed may possibly yield him.

" Few there be that find it." Such is the result, such the sum and effect of the true religion in our world. A little heaven and a large hell are the plain issue of every religious system. Speaking a little further on in this sermon of false prophets, Jesus lays down the proposition that " by their fruits ye shall know them." The fruits of all the religions in our world have been, even by the most friendly estimate, a very mixed produce. But the fruits of one and all of the religions at the so-called day of judgment will be infinitely worse. The bisection of our race at that day will be a sickly spectacle in which the " glad tidings " of Christianity and of every other system will look to small advantage.

All the religions are obvious failures. They are all failures, not only in many secondary senses not necessary here to specify, but failures in their main and primary purpose of succeeding with mankind. It is true several of them have had a measure of success, but in reality it is much more correctly the measure of their failure. Believers in every system, even the most sanguine ones, are conscious of this, and apologists quiet their reason and their hearts in the best way they can ; the most usual contention being

that men wilfully close their eyes to the true light, a contention best left to the adherents of the various true lights to settle amongst themselves.

These words "Few there be that find it," are the manifest and lasting condemnation of Christianity, as of every other religion; for they are equally true of all. It is idle to say they are the condemnation of our race. It is immaterial whether the system is ill-adapted to us, or we are ill-adapted to the system. The result remains, and was antecedently manifest to the all-knowing being who by hypothesis made both the system and ourselves. A scheme knowingly framed to produce non-success is incapable of being screened; and attempts to fasten the failure upon man are futile. By their fruit ye shall know them is a principle that applies to omnipotence with a completeness it never can to the conditioned and the finite.

Apart from the destinations to which the two roads lead hereafter, this symbolism of the broad and narrow ways has been much used as setting forth and depicting the course of human life whilst on earth. As applied to the Christian life here we will only remark that that life is pictured in very contradictory ways; for whilst some believers seem to have been very happy, others appear to have been very miserable. But the once prevalent idea that a life of goodness and virtue on earth is an arduous and difficult one, and the way of vice smooth and easy—the latter a broad and the other a narrow way—is as false as any idea of the kind well could be. It was once, however, considered a very pious theory as giving support to the necessity of a rectification hereafter.

The truth on this matter, always evident to the best observers, is now abundantly clear, to which the establishment of the true theory of morals has given a scientific basis. The way of rectitude and goodness is the pleasant way. No doubt, as on other subjects, so-called wise sayings and proverbs, secular and scriptural, may be quoted on both sides; but the sayings that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and that the way of the transgressor is hard, state the real truth. Wrong-doing is a mistake in the most literal sense of the word mistake—an injurious miscalculation. None of the conclusions of physical science are more certain and more unescapeable than that wrong-doing is harmful to the wrong-doer. Nor are the most subtle and refined and even undiscovered forms of

evil and vice any exception to the inexorable rule ; they simply work their injurious results in subtle and more refined, but equally deleterious, forms also.

“Beware of false prophets.” One of the best—if not the very best—pieces of advice contained in this sermon. How much needed this good advice has ever been, history sorrowfully attests. For what mean all the huge false religions in the

15 ¶ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

world to-day, many of which have existed for thousands of years, and which amongst them yet dominate the great bulk of our species? They simply mean that mankind have given to religious pretenders an unworthy credence; have yielded to religious claimants a groundless faith. And one of the most curious features of all this, half pathetic and half ludicrous, is that the arrant and egregious nature of every other religion than his own is palpable to the victim of each. Pious souls are fond of reproaching scepticism as a cold and unlovable spirit, and yet when applied to any faith but their own it seems to be so wise and so rational. We do not admit that scepticism is in itself unlovable: and the slowness with which it is surrendered is ever the measure of the worth of the conviction that overcomes it. It is the credulous spirit that is really mean and unlovable; and of all the weaknesses of humanity none is comparable in its mischievous and disastrous consequences to the weakness of credulity. It is much to be regretted that, like the prophets he warns his hearers to beware of, the Prophet of Nazareth, as we shall see, praises quick and easy faith when applied to himself.

Six centuries after Jesus founded his faith there arose a great false prophet who founded a mighty creed whose adherents equal probably in number, and certainly in intensity of faith, and who much exceed in unanimity, the living believers in Jesus himself. Since the appearance of the great Prophet of Mecca there have been other false prophets also; but happily very minor ones in success, if not in desert. We may well hope that the race of false prophets of any magnitude has now ended; and we may well believe it also, for the rôle of a false prophet in a scientific age is evidently a very uphill one to play. The task indeed, even in comparatively recent times, has been essayed, and not without some little success. But the power of religious enthusiasm and the power of effrontery once so great in the world, have dwindled down in modern surroundings

to a very modest quantum at the best. A prophet of any kind—it is to be feared that the true ones have ceased to visit our earth—would now be put through an ordeal little to his taste, whether enthusiast or knave. The hole and corner effects that so often in superstitious ages sufficed to secure the faith and adhesion of men would avail naught in modern conditions: and a false prophet would now be more in the nature of a buffoon than of anything else. The list of the world's false prophets is a long and sorrowful one. We may well hope and believe it is now virtually closed.

“Which come to you in sheep's clothing.” This is a happy touch. And in a long discourse to his disciples, found at the end of this Gospel, Jesus gives some other happy sketches of the arts of these gentry, such as resorting to “deserts” and to “secret chambers,” practices from which certain true prophets even were not altogether to be acquitted.

“Sheep's clothing.” Yes, Reader, all the religious founders covered themselves with a profusion of sheep's clothing, of the finest and woolliest of fleeces. They yearn towards us; they are full of tenderness; full of bowels and mercies; they long to embrace us; to hug us to their capacious hearts, and to do us good. And the magnificent promises many of them hold out to their followers show that there is no limit to their generosity. But neglect them, or challenge them, and all is changed. To use a Christian metaphor, these doves then become serpents.

Deeply sorry are we that fidelity to the object of this work compels us here to write that in this respect the Prophet of Nazareth was not better than most of the other great religious founders. The next Gospel ends by telling us that belief or damnation was the last message Jesus left on earth; and further on in this Gospel the painful task awaits us of pondering upon the everlasting fire into which he declares it to be his intention to place men.

Yet, little as we like, greatly as we dislike, the many false prophets who have so successfully palmed themselves upon the bulk of mankind we cannot, except in one special sense and to a limited extent, concur in the “ravening wolves” theory of them. Conscious pretence, and pious fraud of a more or less refined kind, were and must have been present in such false religious claimants, unless we suppose enthusiasm or hallucination of a very complete kind which

is no doubt possible. But taking the three great false prophets who sway the majority of our species, the notion that Buddha, Confucius, and Mahomet were ravening wolves and mere knaves is one that would commend itself to few thinkers. They may have been self-deceived or may not. But they were clearly enthusiasts and daring dogmatists, animated largely, if not solely, by a desire to enforce upon men what they thought to be good; and in order to accomplish that end either sincerely believed themselves to possess, or did not hesitate to assume and to profess supernatural illumination, just as for a like purpose, so many ancient lawgivers had professed it also. The fruits of these prophets in the hereafter will be terrible and calamitous indeed; and we are not able to concur with those who maintain that their fruits here have been of any very great value taken as a whole. But the ravening wolf theory of these great celebrities is one we are equally unable to adopt.

The test and criterion of false prophets, Jesus declares to be their "fruits." It certainly seems a pity some

16 Ye shall know
them by their fruits.
Do men gather grapes
of thorns, or figs of
thistles?

more immediate and less costly method of testing these personages was not practicable.

Even in this chapter, and still more later on, Jesus, however, credits false prophets and false Christs with the ability to perform mighty works, and to show great signs and wonders, against which he deemed it necessary again and again to warn even his own Apostles. If this be so, it is certainly not possible to see how ordinary people were to tell a false prophet from a true one in any reasonable time.

The fruits of false prophets are, in a purely religious sense, as ascertained hereafter, fearful and calamitous. But in an earthly and natural sense the fruits of false prophets are a very mixed and varying produce. He must have been a false prophet indeed who taught no portion of good amongst his falsehood, and we may safely say there has never been such a one. Many of the false prophets taught some very excellent things; and it is not possible to doubt that their influence upon their followers has in many ways been good and beneficial. What is claimed for Christianity on this point is equally true of other systems; the adducing of extra-natural reasons and deterrents having, with some natures at least, great and effective potency. Whatever we may think of wine and of games of chance, for example, the way in which the Prophet of

Mecca has induced 250,000,000 of people to be total abstainers and non-gamblers is manifest. We are not approvers of even good things resting for their practice on artificial grounds ; but the doing of good things from other grounds than the true one is evident the world over. The efficacy and operation of the supposed religious sanction upon a believer are patent whatever may be his creed ; and are unhappily independent also of the inherent merit of the thing thus supposed to be divinely sanctioned. Whether the command be to love a neighbour as ourself, or to stone him to death ; whether the prohibition be from pork or from polygamy, it is, when believed to come from heaven, likely to be carried out by such believer.

Judgment by results of the false prophets and their systems, except in the transcendental sense of their determination of men's destiny after death, is thus a principle only partially applicable. The fruits in this world of other religions have been, like the fruits of Christianity—very mixed. The main mischief the world has suffered from its religions has been not so much from their teachings as from the animosities and strifes they have given rise to. The languid faiths of our times can indeed agree to differ ; but the vigorous beliefs of the past detested each other, and filled the earth with ill-will and, when possessing the power, with inhumanity also.

In support of his thesis Jesus resorts to the vegetable world, and endeavours to establish an analogy between things in which, to our thinking, the elements of any real analogy are conspicuously wanting. Men do not gather grapes from thorns, neither do they expect to do so. But they expect to, and actually see the self-same men doing and producing both good and evil. Did not even the man declared to be after Jesus' own heart produce good fruit and corrupt fruit ?

Good trees and corrupt trees are imagery out of which it is

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit ; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

impossible to extract any useful or intelligible teaching. If men, like trees, are helpless to alter their fruit it is not much use addressing sermons to them. Jesus seems to have had peculiar views regarding vegetable responsibility, as we shall see illustrated in his

punishment of a fig tree for not bearing even in advance of the time for figs. It almost seems, after all, that fig trees, like thistles, can be corrupt. It is only too true that "good" men, both can and

do things not good ; and true, also, that “ evil ” men can and do some very good things. Later on, Jesus’ favourite analogy for good men and bad ones is that of sheep and goats ; a simile which for the purpose of typifying unqualified good and unqualified evil is as unsatisfactory and as infelicitous as that of vegetable products.

What we ought to understand by this declaration is not easy to gather. A little further on we shall find Jesus forbidding to pull up tares, and commanding to let them grow up along with the wheat. And as regards the immediate subject in hand, so far from the systems of false prophets with their corrupt fruits being cut down and cast into the fire, are not those great creeds that were here when Jesus came, here still ? The cutting down and burning of false things, are thus clearly deferred to the judgment day ; and though a celestial, a very disastrous and miserable policy it assuredly is.

Jesus here repeats the general principle that “ by their fruits ye shall know them.” Judged by this test, Reader, what are we to say of the fruits of the Prophet of Nazareth ? Have they been all good ? We trow not. Indeed, a little further on Jesus expressly tells us that he came not to send peace on earth, but a sword ; or as we find it stated in another Gospel, “ Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth ? I tell ye Nay, but rather division.” He also candidly tells us that the fruit of his mission is to set men and also women at variance with each other. Unhappily, the teachings of Jesus have not only set men at variance, but have caused them to continue so ; and especially amongst those who profess his own faith.

We have already alluded to the terrible havoc produced in the world by the conflict of creed against creed ; and the strifes between Christianity and Mahometanism in particular for centuries soaked our earth, and especially the holy land, with human blood. But the unhappy peculiarity with the followers of the Prophet of Nazareth has been not so much their contests with other creeds as their strifes amongst themselves. What Christians have done to and inflicted upon each other forms one of the darkest chapters in the world’s history. The very word Christianity, even in our day, summons to the mind the thought of a set of clashing sections whose alienations and mutual hostilities are but thinly veiled by outward civility ; and as between Jesus’ chief Church and the other

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

sections of his followers are not even thus nominally disguised. Jesus describes to us how the introduction of his faith operated in a house ; how it severed father and son, and mother and daughter ; in which respect it but resembled the beginning of every other religious faith. It is a pity he did not go on to describe that highly curious household of faith into which his system was destined to develope.

What makes matters even worse is the foreknowledge his followers insist upon ascribing to Jesus, which—apart altogether from doctrinal conflicts and their consequences, which a few simple words would have entirely prevented—throws upon Jesus in such a terrible subject as the long-continued horrors of persecution a responsibility from which it is not possible to shield him. For the withholding of those peremptory words of prohibition which would have saved our earth from those alleged foreseen crimes and cruelties it is not possible to offer a vestige of palliation, much less of exoneration.

No, Reader, these are not good fruits ; nor will the casuistry of apologists ever persuade men they were, or are. Nor are many other of the fruits of the tree of Christianity much better. Like every other religion, the tree of Christianity has brought forth good fruit and evil fruit ; and if the imagery may be continued, apples of discord have been among its chiefest produce. In the astounding variety of its produce the tree of Christianity has never had a compeer. A tree which yields us Jesuitism and Unitarianism, Calvinism and Universalism, and other manner of fruit it would take long even to name, may safely defy all rivals on this head.

Of the fruit of Christianity at the day of judgment, as of the fruit of every other religion, it is best not to think.

A few verses back Jesus assured his hearers that every one

21 ¶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

who asketh receiveth ; that every seeker finds ; and that every knocker has the door opened to him. Here, however, he declares that not every caller “Lord, Lord” shall enter into the kingdom. Christian commentators

show us how often, and how many, implied but unspoken meanings, additions, and qualifications must be assumed and understood in the interpretations of the sayings of their Master ; and proceed to generously furnish us therewith.

But the harassing variety of their explanatory additions makes us greatly regret that on [at least the most important subjects, such as those that have severed the house of faith, Jesus did not furnish these highly important implied meanings himself.

In this case Jesus explains the previously omitted condition precedent without which asking, seeking, and knocking, will be of no avail. It is a sufficiently severe one. Calls upon Jesus for admission to the kingdom of heaven are not effectual unless the caller does the will of Jesus' father which is in heaven.

The only people who up to this time had known anything of the will of Jehovah were the Jews; and the very diverse views of the divine will entertained even by "my people Israel" are shown to us in the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and other sects into which the children of the kingdom were divided; but who, as the sequel of this Gospel shows us, were only too unanimous in repudiating the further revelations of Jehovah's will Jesus made to them.

Into the contentious subject of the will of God, and what it is as applied to human beings, we shall not attempt to enter; our one observation being that beyond the discharge of our recognized human and humane duties all else is conjecture, leading, if persisted in, to much bickering and religious tumult. We shall find through this Gospel history, as in other history, that everybody claims God as on his side.

If understood in any but a very elementary sense the doing of God's will as a necessary precedent to a successful calling upon Jesus seems exacting, and not very much in harmony with that effectual calling on the name of Jesus by sinners which one version of Christianity makes such a leading feature in its interpretation of the system.

"In that day." The day here referred to is apparently the judgment day, though it is not very certain that hearers would necessarily gather that fact.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

A more alarming and extraordinary statement than the one here laid before us, Reader, could not very well be imagined. Any supposition that Jesus here speaks in irony, or that these claimants to heaven were alleging things they had not really wrought, is not entertainable. We are thus confronted with the distressing fact

that wonderful works done in Jesus' own name may and will be disowned; or at any rate that many who have done these wonderful works will be rejected and condemned.

More disheartening or more appalling reading for professed Christians, and especially for prominent professors, we cannot conceive. The searching of hearts this terrible passage may well cause is manifest. Are the various and conflicting kinds of "Christian" leaders quite sure they are on the right track? As we think of this the gloom and forebodings which so many eminent Christians have placed on record as having experienced in their spiritual life—otherwise so puzzling to outsiders—become accountable.

And certainly, Reader, as we look out into the world and see the conflicting things being taught and done in the name of Jesus it seems to us outsiders that there must be something seriously wrong somewhere; and we begin to feel alarmed as to the safety of the many leaders of religious thought around us. From the occupant of Peter's chair, whose glory of unbroken succession has come through some very tarnished predecessors, down to the commander-in-chief of the strange army that has made its appearance in our own day, and which certainly, in several senses, does some wonderful works in Jesus' name, the many and various leaders in Christendom may well feel misgivings as they ponder the verse now before us and the one that follows it. If these leaders generally do not feel as positive of their own and of each other's fate as the two eminent Christians we have named do, they must surely at times, as they think of all these things, experience grave distrusts and apprehensions.

For the many here spoken of are not the false prophets or false Christs Jesus so often refers to. Neither are they the sceptics and agnostics who have ever so abounded; for these cannot prophesy, or at least cannot feel sure their prophecies will be fulfilled; they cannot cast out devils as they will themselves admit; neither can they do any wonderful works of any religious kind whatever.

The many whom Jesus here declares he will spurn from his presence are those who have done great things in his own name. Who these many and mighty but unaccepted workers in his name may be is a problem that must be left to those concerned. But it is not possible even for an outsider to help a feeling of pity and concern for these great rejected workers for Jesus, and also for the sheep they pastor.

It thus appears that the ability to prophesy and to work wonderful works is no proof of a genuine commission in the worker. As we think of this it is not possible to help asking ourselves, Whence do these non-genuine Christian professors obtain their wonder-working power? When we remember the huge miracle power of Satan we can form an idea whence false prophets and false Christs obtain the great signs and wonders Jesus allows them. But we cannot possibly think that the men here named as casting devils and working wonders in Jesus' name obtain the power from that source. The subject seems surrounded with a mystery which is as unpleasant as it is impenetrable.

The admission here and elsewhere made by Jesus that ability to prophesy, to effect exorcisms, and to accomplish other wonderful works, is no proof of the genuineness of the doer is a weighty and instructive one, and throws a flood of light upon the ideas prevailing on this subject in Jesus' time, and clearly shared by him also. Of a truth miracles in those days could scarcely be considered wonders at all. The idea that ability to work such exploits is a decisive criterion of heavenly agency so far from being laid down in these Gospels is utterly refuted therein. As we have just remarked, Jesus thought it necessary again and again to warn his own disciples against the great signs and wonders of false prophets and false Christs which were of such a nature as "if possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Nor, as we see, are these wonders even when done in his own name, any valid proof of the trustworthiness of the worker. When we think of this, great religious power seems a very unreliable and very perilous possession. And amongst the horrors of the Christian day of judgment few will exceed the repudiation of the many who have done great works in his own name which Jesus here announces will then be witnessed.

What a mercy, what a blessing, it is, Reader, that prophecy, exorcism, and miracles of all kinds have now entirely ceased.

Jesus brings his sermon to a close by declaring the wisdom of those hearers who obey him and carry out his commands, and the folly of those who do not; and for the enforcing of this fact he uses the trite similes of a man who builds a house on a rock and one who builds a house upon sand; the former builder representing the hearer

23 And then will I profess unto 'them, I never knew you: depart, from me, ye that work iniquity.

24 ¶ Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds

blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

who pays heed to Jesus' commands, the latter builder the one who does not. It may be remarked that the prudence and folly of building a house upon a rock and upon sand respectively are very dependent upon surrounding conditions and circumstances, the latter being often a very desirable foundation; and the wisdom of carrying out many of the injunctions of this sermon is also very convincing, as is shown by the abeyance and even

the reversal wisely given to many of them by sensible Christians.

Every sincere teacher who believes his own doctrines necessarily believes that those people are wise who adopt and carry out his teachings, and those people unwise who do not. Nor is even a dogmatic declaration to that effect very objectionable. Unhappily, religious founders always import into religious belief or non-belief an element that never enters into belief or non-belief on any other question—the element of criminality. They overstep the just bounds of exhortation, persuasion, and legitimate entreaty, and demand belief under penalty of the most odious threats.

This attitude forces religious founders into the wretched theory that human belief rests with the will; is the resultant, not of conviction but of mere volition. Hence they divide mankind into two very simple and very convenient divisions—those who will believe and those who will not. No doubt it is true also that they claim to furnish to men wisdom and illumination that ought to satisfy and convince. The answer to this is that their wisdom did not in any case satisfy more than a few even of those who had the advantage of hearing it at first hand. But very few of those who knew Jesus personally believed in him. Many who had walked with him discontinued to do so; nor can we, especially as we call to mind some things he taught, feel any astonishment at their doing so.

Accepting the view that this and the two preceding chapters

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

were one continuous address, and that the whole of that address is here given, these people must have been listening to Jesus for the space of an hour or more. How much of this very varied and not very connected discourse they would be able to remember and digest seems very doubtful. This would doubtless vary very

much with different individuals; but even the best would have but a very imperfect grasp of the very multifarious dissertation they had just listened to.

These people, we read, were astonished at Jesus' doctrine, "for," naively adds our author, "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The manner in which the scribes usually taught was not wanting, we should have thought, in the quality here named; and we must own, without in the least impugning the wisdom or right of Jesus to speak in the way here named, that this verse gives us a better opinion of the scribes than we should otherwise have formed of them.

Authoritative and dogmatic teaching is always more impressive to people such as we may suppose these Galilean folks to have been, than the persuasive and ratiocinative kind. It is with them as it is with children; mere assertion is more effective when alone than if accompanied by the best of reasons. Indeed, the offering of a reason however sound in support of a deliverance positively detracts from its efficacy as suggesting to their minds that the assertion may be questioned and needs proof. When the requisite premises are admitted, and with suitable natures, a pontifical allocution is as potent as an Euclidean demonstration.

Another consideration must have also influenced these hearers greatly in addition to the authoritative style in which Jesus spoke to them. The fame of the preacher as a great wonder-worker had, as we have seen, gone over all Syria; and in this particular locality that fame must have been especially great and well proved. A teacher who corroborated his doctrine with exploits of such a kind—even making some allowance for possible doubt as to the source of such power—must have spoken, one would think, with great weight and convincing effect.

The real effect upon these hearers of the doctrine which Jesus had delivered we are not told. They were astonished, but whether they were convinced and satisfied does not appear. The way in which Jesus had dealt with "them of old time" and the way in which he had merely substituted his personal mandate, his own I say, in place thereof, might not unnaturally give these people pause if they were attached to the existing faith to begin with.

One thing appears very clearly in the early history of Christianity, and that is that Christians were as few and as scarce in Galilee as they were in Judea.

MATTHEW VIII.

WE not only do not know the particular mountain upon which

CHAPTER VIII.

2 *Christ cleanseth the leper, 5 healeth the centurion's servant, 14 Peter's mother in law, 16 and many other diseased: 18 sheweth how he is to be followed: 23 stilleth the tempest on the sea, 28 driveth the devils out of two men possessed, 31 and suffereth them to go into the swine.*

1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Jesus delivered his sermon, we are also unable to fix with any certainty the district in which it was situated. Hence the narrative is resumed under the disadvantage of not knowing where we are; a situation in which readers often find themselves in this Gospel history.

We have already learnt how Jesus had wrought miracles broadcast, to the extent of procuring not only national but even foreign fame. Here we come to the first of the detailed miracles with which the Gospels are so plentifully studded. It is a short, simple, and dignified account of the cure of a leper. The cure was effected—so far as such a word is usable in such a connection—by means of touch, and took place instantaneously. It must have been a most delightful sight to witness a blind,

deformed, or diseased person, instantly made whole. There is something pleasing even in reading of such an occurrence. Miracles of healing, wherever met with, always affect us in quite a different fashion from miracles of any other sort, however imposing. The reason of this is not far to seek. Our sympathy is called into play. Even in purely natural things this same fact is very observable. Few things yield us keener pleasure and satisfaction than to witness or read of the termination of sorrow, trouble, and suffering in any one.

Any one who can comprehend the picture here placed before us—

4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

a person followed by great multitudes performing a miracle and then commanding the subject of it to tell no man—has a power we do not possess. To us such a picture stultifies itself.

The constant injunctions of secrecy made by Jesus in the earlier portion of his public life are very curious. Even to theologians they are inexplicable, as a reference to the explanations they offer shows us. Why secrecy was desirable, indeed in what sense it was possible, with someone who went about all Galilee

teaching and preaching in the synagogues, and healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people, passes comprehension or even reasonable conjecture.

Jesus gives a second injunction to this cleansed leper, which in its way is also not a little astonishing. He tells him to go and show himself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded. What Moses commanded on this subject may be seen in the Book of Leviticus, and an astonishing medley it is. We may just summarize it by saying that the cleansed leper had to bring to the priest two live birds along with some cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. One of these birds had to be killed in an earthen vessel over running water; the living bird with the cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop had then to be dipped in the blood of the killed bird, after which the live bird was let loose into a field, and the cleansed leper sprinkled seven times. Eight days after this the whilom leper had to bring two he lambs and one ewe lamb, together with a quantity of flour and one log of oil. One of the he lambs was then slain and with its blood the priest smeared the tip of the leper's right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the great toe of his right foot. This was followed by a like process with the oil, and then by a number of other formalities too many to enumerate. Whether this leper cured by Jesus and the priest to whom he resorted went through the pitiful rigmarole commanded by Moses is not stated. Let us hope they did not.

We have already remarked how Jesus had personally complied with circumcision, baptism, and other Jewish requirements. In the case now before us, and in other instances later on, we find a like compliance enjoined upon others also. When we remember these things we need not be surprised at the dissensions between his own Apostles, and amongst the early Christians generally, concerning the extent to which Jesus was supposed or understood to have abrogated Judaism, and to have relieved his followers from bondage to it.

For almost, if not quite, the first time we can here definitely

5 ¶ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

fix the place where a recorded event in our author's history took place. It is indeed a pleasure and a relief to be able to do this. Continued vagueness both of time and place is very trying.

It was at Capernaum that one of the smallest certainly, but one of the most circumstantially recorded, of the

miracles of Jesus took place. At any rate Jesus himself was there at the time of the occurrence, wherever the home of the cured servant may have been.

That a Roman officer should believe in Jesus is, it must be admitted, surprising; for even Jesus himself was surprised at the fact. His extraordinary anxiety for a servant on the part of this officer, too, was somewhat un-Roman; but on that very account did him all the more credit.

The ready willingness of Jesus is very pleasant, and contrasts very agreeably with the reluctance he displayed in other non-Jewish cases; though it is, of course, possible that this Roman's servant was a Jew.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

The protestation of his humility and unworthiness on the part of this centurion contrasts oddly with the importance he goes on to ascribe to himself. A Roman centurion was a petty officer in command of one hundred soldiers; and the way in which Jesus is made acquainted by this officer with the great powers he wields is certainly ludicrous. The combination of humility and pride in the same person is not in any way uncommon. It is greatly to be feared that in most of such combinations the pride is much

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*.

more trustworthy than the humility.

We have already remarked that in these Gospels events are described as impressing Jesus, and information as influencing his actions in an ordinary and natural way. Here surprise is ascribed to him. Our Omniscient Creator is astonished, and marvels just as anyone else might at find-

10 When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

ing something he never expected. For dealing with this very awkward matter commentators have a variety of plans. Some say the evangelists used such language for convenience, though aware it could not be strictly accurate. Some think Jesus accommodated himself to human modes of expression; in this case, for example, making an exclamation of surprise in a merely formal way, though, knowing all about this Roman beforehand, he could not feel any. Some have recourse to the double-nature, double-consciousness, theory. This is an expedient full of perils, and is only resorted to by wiser theologians under extreme pressure; in

addition to which, it never really explains anything. To us it seems difficult if not impossible, for a human being to write consistently of a Being who knew everything.

It is not perfectly clear what it was that Jesus here marvelled at. The unexpected faith shown by this Roman, his great humility, his solicitude for his servant, and his description of his own office are all in their way marvellous. From what Jesus proceeds to say it was, it would seem, this centurion's strong faith that chiefly caused him to marvel.

Jesus then makes the truly remarkable declaration that he had not found so great faith as that shown by this Roman in all Israel. Not one single Jew had he met with whose faith was so great. What the disciples thought of this declaration it would have been most interesting to know.

Surely Jesus must have begun to see that his partiality for the Jews was, what everything else obviously showed it to be, a very ill-chosen and unworthy favouritism. Unhappily, we shall find that that partiality was very persistent and reappeared again and again.

This verse is generally regarded as a most important one, being considered to be a declaration that henceforth heaven is thrown open to the Gentiles. It is, however, scarcely possible to fix with certainty when that glorious event first took place. It is, for example, difficult to suppose that the Magi, whom many regard as the first fruits of the Gentiles, had not by this time reached there.

11 And I say unto you,
That many shall come
from the east and west,
and shall sit down with
Abraham, and Isaac,
and Jacob, in the king-
dom of heaven.

Nor is this the only important thing this verse contains. For it shows us that salvation was practicable and had been attained long antecedent to the mission and death of Jesus. By what means this was accomplished we cannot know. It must certainly have been by faith, not by works, so far as the three here named are concerned. The theory that the Atonement of Jesus operated before it took place opens up too many problems to be entered into here. If it be a truth that that atonement did thus operate, we think Christians will join us in the most sincere wish that it might so have continued to operate for ever.

In addition to the three here named by Jesus we shall find that two other ancient Jews, Moses and Elijah, had also already secured salvation; for we shall find that they left heaven and came once

more to earth to visit Jesus when he was here. How far we should be justified in extending hope of salvation in the ancient world outside "my people Israel" we do not know. We could mention names of ancient worthies far greater, nobler, and purer than Judea ever produced, whom we feel sure that the most pious believers would like to meet with in heaven.

The honour of sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is, we presume, one upon which very different estimates would be placed. For our part we have no desire whatever to sit down with or near them. There are certain other ancients to sit down with whom we should greatly covet. But the three patriarchs mentioned by Jesus have no fascination for us. How men whose lives were so heavily blotched as theirs found their way into heaven is a mystery; for we read that adulterers and certain other offenders cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. But perhaps that is a passage of Scripture that needs to be taken, as we are so often reminded, in "conjunction" with others.

If the last verse was a cheering one, this is a very sad one. It is only too clear that the children of Israel will be almost entirely outcasts. To his own brethren and to his own countrymen Jesus was not acceptable; and as non-acceptation of of him means, if we understand aright, damnation, the subject is assuredly a very melancholy one to think of.

It thus appears that the Jews did not gain but lost by being Heaven's favourites. Even if it be true that this calamitous outcome arose from their own faults, still the arrangement was in no sense a happy one; and to our thinking, well deserved the result that befell it.

We shall find that Jesus had a number of favourite phrases, of which this—weeping and gnashing of teeth—is one.

Jesus brings the incident to a close by majestically commanding the centurion to go his way, with the assurance that owing to his faith the request he had made would be granted. The palsy accordingly disappeared the same hour.

It is a most conspicuous feature of these Gospels that we scarcely ever hear again of the subjects of Jesus' miracles. We hear no more mention of this centurion or his cured servant. One would surely have expected that they would have

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

both become enthusiastic missionaries of the gospel. To us moderns, it seems that men who had beheld these wonders, and still more men who had themselves been the subjects of them, could not possibly remain inert, could not possibly contain themselves, but must proclaim far and wide what they had seen and experienced. But so far as we can gather, even the cure of the sick and the diseased of an entire district seems to have left no real impression behind it.

It is most interesting, and still more instructive, to compare the version of the foregoing incident, and also the accounts of the other events of this chapter, furnished to us in the other Gospels, with the accounts thereof here placed before us. The extraordinary fashion in which events are transposed and the amazing "variations" in the accounts thus given of them are nothing short of distressing.

An incident of a very interesting kind is now recorded, from

14 ¶ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto them.

which we learn that the chief of the Apostles was a householder, that he had a wife, and also a mother-in-law. It is of course possible he may at this time have been, as some think, a widower; but this is extremely unlikely as few men indeed continue to live with a mother-in-

law after a wife's death. This is one of the very rare homely and domestic allusions found in the Gospels, and the incident interests us far more for the information it incidentally yields than for the main purpose for which it is given—the cure of a fever.

We think almost all readers will be pleased to reflect that the Rock upon which the Christian Church is founded, the man to whom Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, was a man who had felt and practised the domestic affections. It is most reassuring to feel that all the experiences represented by a house, a wife, and a mother-in-law were known to Peter, the binder and looser of all earthly things.

The way in which Jesus so constantly cured the entire sick of a

district is very agreeable reading; though the ruin of the physicians therein may serve to remind us how unqualified and absolute good is not to be obtained in this world. The application to Jesus of Jewish prophecies, as they are termed, has not seldom a very odd

16 ¶ When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken

by Esaias, the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

effect. The idea here laid before us that Jesus bare the sicknesses of those he relieved is a very strange one. In what sense we ought to understand that Jesus bare the leprosy, the palsy, the fever, and other ailments of his patients we cannot discover. The results that have flowed from figures of speech, especially from some used by Jesus himself, are enough to make us groan.

The use of the singular phrase "the other side," without adding

18 ¶ Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou goest.

20 And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

what of, shows us again what we so often feel, that lucidity is not the writer's strong point. He frequently leaves something in doubt that a phrase, aye often a single word, would have made perfectly clear.

There was one—a Scribe, too—upon whom Jesus had clearly made a powerful impression, for he declares he will follow him wheresoever he goes. The response to this warm-hearted declaration made by Jesus, if we have the

whole of it, cannot be termed very tender or encouraging.

Religious founders are such sombre personages that we hardly like to smile at anything they say. It is not that they do not give us occasion. Jesus here laments the want of a home, comparing himself by way of contrast with foxes which have holes!

This plaintive statement of Jesus gives rise to a train of conjectures which it is impossible to help ourselves making. Had he no recognized home? His mother was, as we know, still living. Where was her abode? We shall presently also meet with Jesus' brethren who along with their mother, or at any rate his own mother, were wishful to see him. We also read of his sisters. How or why Jesus should be without a home it is difficult to imagine.

It was a general tradition in early times that Jesus personally followed the occupation of a carpenter. The apocryphal Gospels deal with this fact very freely. In the next Gospel we find him expressly termed "the carpenter." If we take this word and what it implies in any natural sense, it would seem to have necessitated some more or less regular abode on the part of Jesus. It would also imply the occupation of some portion of his time, and the presumable receipt of earnings or remuneration. The application of such thoughts to the Christian conception of Jesus, or to

any one possessed of miracle-power, feels highly incongruous ; indeed it is difficult to entertain such thoughts with any approach to sedateness. It is a grave and very significant feature of the gospel history that so many elementary facts are omitted or left in ambiguity. Some, we know, are of opinion that the omissions so conspicuous in all Scripture show, like its contents, divine wisdom. Perhaps they do ; but this is a point we will not here enter into.

Many Christian writers are able to see in this lament of Jesus something touching and pathetic, and much sentimental writing in more or less good taste has been bestowed upon it. It is a view of the matter which we regret to say that we are quite unable to enter into or appreciate.

Few human beings, we make bold to say, are more sensitive to the spectacle, or more responsive to the narration, of privation and suffering than ourselves. And were we free to consider Jesus of Nazareth as merely human, we could feel for the sufferings his life and fate may have involved the full measure of sympathy due to them. But when we are asked to consider him as our Creator in the garb of a man, we are unable to look upon any alleged trials and sufferings with one single iota of intelligent response, or with one morsel of genuine sympathy. We are totally unable to get our thoughts or our feelings into any kind of harmony with such a theory. For if that theory be true any sufferings endured by Jesus were purely voluntary, and entirely avoidable. The angels who ministered to him after his meeting with Satan were always at his call, and if he did not choose to make use of their good offices where is the point of any complaint ? Enforced suffering is always touching. The endurance of avoidable and needless privation we are obliged to leave to the admiration of those able to feel it.

The painful passage here before us makes us share the patent regret

21 And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.

with which even believers read it. For it is evident that even the most pious Christians are astonished and shocked to find that their blessed Lord should ever have said anything

so coarse and so peculiarly offensive as that here recorded. A certain disciple wished to go and bury his father. But Jesus forbade him ; commanded him to come along ; adding, " let the dead bury their dead " ; a phrase which for its combination of odious qualities it would be difficult to match.

It appears from this that when a man joined himself to Jesus he was to rise superior to such mundane things as seeing to the burial of a father. Such things were to be left to the spiritually dead ; that is, to those not illumined with the new evangel ; in plain words, to those in whom worldly feelings of affection, duty, and good sense had not been extinguished by religious enthusiasm. The spiritually dead were to see to the burial of the physically dead ; from which we see how fortunate it was, nay how necessary it was, that some should continue unillumined.

The way in which so many of the injunctions of religious founders are dealt with by their followers is most refreshing ; and in no case more so than in the way in which Christians deal with so many of the commands of their Lord and master, their disobedience to and non-observance of which are greatly to be commended. For later on, we shall find lines of conduct declared by Jesus to be necessary and becoming in his followers which are even more startling, if not more unpleasant, than the one now before us.

The strange vicissitudes shown in the histories of religious doctrines have seldom had a more pointed illustration than in the instance before us. In the course of time Christians have come to entirely reverse their master's teaching and have made burial a favourite occasion for religious edification. It is now used as an opportunity for the exercise of much religious unction, and for the making of spiritual capital. And such have been the extent and the variety of customs and beliefs that have grown around it, that the very name of Christian burial summons up a host of associations, conspicuous amongst which are the contests which sacerdotal intolerance and encroachments on the subject have led to. We hope this disciple had the good sense and the manliness to disobey the command given to him, and that he went to his father's burial.

To listen to modern Christians, one would gather that to follow out Christianity is quite consistent with the varied duties and proprieties, and even the comforts and pleasures of life ; that it is not necessary to break with any of the ordinary pursuits and avocations of men ; and certainly the average conventional Christian of these days differs so little from other men—from the " world "—that any distinctive, indeed any discernible, marks of differentiation would be hard to discover.

The truth is that modern Christianity is original Christianity plus

many things, and minus many things. What now passes as "Christianity" in these latter days is Christianity so leavened with common sense, so qualified by and imbued with the spirit of the age, so diluted with the accommodations rendered necessary by the revelations of science and the progress of knowledge, that it bears in many respects but a faint likeness to the original. And if in some points, as we believe, this amended Christianity is a degeneration from that of Jesus, it is, we also believe, upon the whole, a vast improvement thereupon.

The sea, as it is here called, upon which this event took place was

23 ¶ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, inasmuch that the ship was covered with the waves : but he was asleep.

a lake some fifteen miles long and five miles wide ; and the ships then in use would now be termed small boats. Many celebrated men have possessed a wonderful and most enviable command of sleep. Still the ability to remain asleep on a small boat with the waves washing over it during a "great tempest" seems to be

beyond any natural power.

We own, Reader, to finding something pleasant in thinking of our Creator asleep ; and shall pass by any of the theological dilemmas which the idea of suspended consciousness on the part of the Deity may raise. Modern thinkers are generally very severe upon what are called the old anthropomorphic notions of God. In one respect we do not agree with them. We sincerely hope God is as like a good man as possible, and we like anything showing us that he partakes of the neutral and the better parts of our nature. The real objection to anthropomorphic ideas of the Deity is, that men have as a rule made their Gods resemble a bad man so much. The conception of God as a perfectly good man with unlimited power is a delightful and glorious one. We ardently hope it is a true conception, and would give much to be able to believe it to be so.

Becoming alarmed, the disciples awoke Jesus, whereupon he performed a very agreeable miracle ; he rebuked the wind and the water and there ensued a "great calm." This may, we think, be considered the largest of Jesus' miracles. We have, it is true, no means of applying measurement to miracle power ; but the power over natural forces sufficient to stay a tempest even on this sheet of water seems greater, as far as one may judge, than that needed in any of the other recorded cases.

The disciples—by which term the apostles, or some of them, for our author himself had not yet been called,

25 And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us : we perish.

26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

are here presumably meant—were a very timid set of men, as the remainder of this Gospel shows us; nor did three years' companionship with our Creator strengthen their courage, as a very painful and unanimous act of cowardice on their part at the end of this Gospel shows us. What is perhaps still more surprising, their faith, which Jesus here terms little, seems to have continued little, as many things

in the rest of this history, and as a significant remark of our author in his closing chapter, make only too clear.

On the opposite side of the lake from Capernaum lived the

28 ¶ And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.

29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

Gergesenes; amongst whom Jesus and his disciples now found themselves. His purpose in going to these people cannot be determined. His stay was a very short one, and he left them and recrossed the lake under circumstances of a very unpleasant kind. Indeed, the whole episode of this visit to the Gergesenes constitutes reading of the most painful, and most nauseous character.

Upon disembarking, Jesus was met by two unfortunate creatures who were possessed by a vast number of devils. They were very violent and a terror to the district, as we see more particularly described in the two next Gospels, where the actions these devils caused their victims to perform are set forth in detail.

By some means or other, these poor things, or the troops of devils occupying them—for devil-possession renders individual personality an enigma—recognize Jesus and accost him. If we regard their salutation as coming from the men themselves, it is a very singular one. "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?" naturally makes us wonder why they should address Jesus at all; whilst the second question, "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" is a strange one in many ways. Surely even Jesus himself, if so disposed, could not add to the torment these unfortunates already endured.

If, on the other hand, we regard this speech as coming not from

the men themselves, but from the devils inside them, the two questions put to Jesus by them are very obscure, and we have not the advantage of any reply from Jesus.

From some cause these devils had begun to anticipate that Jesus meant to eject them; and they request, if he did so, that he would do them the favour of permitting them to enter into a neighbouring herd of swine. Rather than remain entirely homeless, these roving infernals were willing to occupy even swine. What pleasure they could derive from such a habitation is not discernible. But may not the same be said of their occupation of men, women, and children?

We feel to have got down to a very low pass here, Reader; and it is indeed difficult to address our thoughts to matter like this. In the account given in the next Gospel of this most disgusting scene, we are told that the number of the swine here destroyed was 2000. The spectacle of 2000 swine each possessed with one or more devils rushing over a steep into the water; the horrible noises to which these animals would presumably give vent: their splashing into the lake; the terror and flight of their keepers, would compose altogether a weird exhibition. The motive of these devils in thus acting after taking possession of these swine is incomprehensible. It seems most like a grim jest upon the compliance made by Jesus with their request. Nor is the consolation that has been suggested as derivable from this event—that these devils were drowned as well as the swine—we fear well grounded. If we understand the nature of these beings correctly, they are deathless; the bodies of these swine would only afford them a momentary dwelling place, and there is reason to fear that long as it is since the adventure here recorded of them took place, these same sprites are still lurking about our planet in some shape or other.

The keepers or owners of these drowned swine made their way back into “the city,” wherever that may have been; and reported everything there, including what had befallen to the “possessed of the devils.” Whether that phrase refers to the men or the swine, to both of which it was

30 And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.

31 So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

32 And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

33 And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.

unhappily applicable, our author leaves us in his usual manner to make out for ourselves.

The impression made in the city by this strange news was evidently very great. The "whole city" came out to see the portentous visitor who had wrought this strange exploit. Probably these citizens had made up their minds beforehand to request him to depart; if so, the sight of Jesus did not alter their resolution. They evidently and naturally believed that a great magician or sorcerer had arrived amongst them; and after what had occurred it is easy to understand they were not wishful for him to remain. They accordingly begged of Jesus to go away, a request he seems to have at once complied with. He does not seem to have made any reply to these citizens, nor to have made any effort to enlighten them as to his true character. This expedition to the country of the Gergesenes was obviously not of a missionary character.

In the last verse of the last Gospel the writer tells us "there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." What we possess is thus a mere fraction of the total doings and sayings of Jesus. This, indeed, is quite evident; for the events and utterances recorded in these Gospels would occupy but a small portion of the time Jesus spent with mankind. On what principle the respective Gospel writers made their selections; whether they have given us the cream or simply a fair sample of the vast whole of the sayings and doings of Jesus we cannot tell.

We are not amongst those who think the world is much the poorer or less wise from not having more Gospel matter. Indeed, if much of the vast unrecorded remainder resembled what we are here perusing, our non-possession thereof is a matter not of regret, but of great satisfaction. For our part, Reader, we frankly own that the only additional Gospel to be desired would have been one written by one of those followers of Jesus who "walked with him no more."

It is a common Christian observation that the miracles of Jesus were beneficent ones. Almost all those recorded are certainly so. And in this sense they very agreeably differed from Old Testament miracles which were largely malicious, and from some of the

miracles of his own disciples which were malicious also. For Jesus opened men's eyes, but never—like Paul—blinded them. He raised men from the dead, but never, so far as is known to us—like Peter—struck them dead. There is, however, no alternative but to place the destruction of these swine in the category of objectionable miracles.

Contempt is probably the feeling most stirred by the narrative here laid before us. But it may well and justly be turned to abhorrence as we think of what such records once led men to believe and to perpetrate. Only two centuries back learned Christians were writing treatises in defence of the belief in devil-possession, and in defence even of witch-burning, mainly because, indeed solely because, the former hideous superstition was set forth and the latter crime was enjoined in "Holy Scripture."

Passages like this feel, Reader, to throw a strange light over all this Gospel. Proceedings like these now before us are a heavy call on the stoutest faith. It is true some pious authors tell us that sore trials of faith are needed to test and prove men; and the lament of an old writer that there were not more Scripture difficulties for his faith to surmount is well known. Probably he would have enjoyed an additional pair of genealogies by Mark and John. But the taste for difficulties is not common; and those presented to us in Scripture are amply sufficient for all useful purposes.

The performances of Christian commentators upon the paragraph now before us are a sorrowful study. We know of nothing more truly pathetic than the efforts of good men to improve their Holy Scriptures. It is painfully clear they keenly feel what they softly term the difficulties of those writings; feel them as much as outsiders feel them. And whilst the remarks of Christian commentators upon such trying portions of Scripture are often saddening, they often excite a measure of sympathy also. How evidently would those faithful souls rejoice if such passages were not there! And how, in some senses, even touching are their efforts to deal with them and tone them down; to try to persuade themselves that in some way or other the text does not quite mean what it only too obviously does mean.

It is true there is another class of expositors who take up another attitude in such cases. They assume a bold demeanour and proffer to their readers a feeble subterfuge which they allege to be a satisfactory solution. A comparison of earlier and later Christian

commentaries reveals the pleasing fact that this method is less adopted than it used to be. The number of readers for whom such a method of catering is suitable is ever lessening. The method of covering and hiding a Scripture difficulty with a profusion of saintly verbiage is a plan much adopted in later works. It often doubtless tends to draw away a reader's attention from the difficulty itself; an end which with pious readers is willingly concurred in. But with the difficulty now before us this plan is not very successful. What plan, indeed, is?

MATTHEW IX.

HAVING recrossed the lake from the country of the Gergesenes,

CHAPTER IX.

2 Christ curing one sick of the palsy, 9 calleth Matthew from the receipt of custom, 10 eateth with publicans and sinners, 14 defendeth his disciples for not fasting, 20 cureth the bloody issue, 23 raiseth from death Jairus' daughter, 27 giveth sight to two blind men, 32 healeth a dumb man possessed of a devil, 36 and hath compassion of the multitude.

1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Jesus returned into his own city. By that term it is generally understood that Capernaum is here meant. If that be so, the country of the Gergesenes would be a familiar object from the Capernaum side of the lake, and could hardly be, one would think, a very pleasant subject of reminiscence to Jesus or his disciples. A request to depart is never a pleasant remembrance.

The connection of Jesus with the places in these Gospels mostly identified with him is of a very hazy character. Though born in Bethlehem, that place is never afterwards alluded to.

It seems probable that he lived for thirty years in Nazareth, for he was known as the prophet of that city; and according to our author, he fulfilled prophecy by being known as a Nazarene. The reason of his leaving Nazareth and coming to dwell in Capernaum is not clearly stated, though hinted at in the third Gospel. Even his relation to and his visits to Jerusalem, that city of the great king where his earthly life was brought to an end, are surrounded with difficulties better known to none than to Gospel "harmonists."

What we should be justified in inferring from the phrase "his own city," as applied to Capernaum, is very uncertain. We were reading a short time ago a lament of Jesus that he had not "where to lay his head." It is scarcely possible but that in "his own city" he must have possessed a home of some kind. Many think he

made Peter's house his home. It is profitless work reconstructing unrecorded history. Men may build up ingenious edifices of conjecture which may often be near, or may be far off, the truth; but they are castles in the air when finished.

Another case of palsy is now brought to Jesus; a case in which the patient was apparently so helpless as to need to be carried on a bed. Jesus saluted him in a most encouraging, but probably a very unexpected way. He bade him be of good cheer and forgave him his sins. It is not improbable that a momentary twinge of disappointment may have passed over the palsied man and his friends as they heard this; though the boon granted by Jesus was in reality far greater than the one they had come to seek. The subject of a connection between sin and affliction which may seem to be here raised, we shall find brought before us more definitely later on.

Some Scribes who had heard this declaration of Jesus, holding that Jehovah alone could forgive sin, and not being aware that Jesus and Jehovah were one and the same, said to themselves that such a declaration was blasphemous.

Knowing the thoughts passing in the minds of these Scribes, Jesus addressed them as here given. A modern reply to the latter of Jesus' two questions would probably be that the one was as easy to say as the other, and as difficult to do; though there are those who would hold that the former of the two achievements is in reality the more unaccomplishable.

Jesus now proceeds to demonstration, and does so in the most convincing, straightforward, and thoroughgoing manner. In effect he says to these Scribes—I have forgiven this man his sins, which ye consider a blasphemy, but that ye may know the power I possess, I will now free this man from his palsy also. Which, as we read, Jesus at once proceeded to do. The man rose up from the bed on which he had been brought, and returned to his home free from palsy and free from sin. Was not this proof positive? What more could men want?

2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

Reader, those few simple words of Jesus, "That ye may know," concede the whole that non-believers have ever contended for, namely—that it is the bounden duty of a religious claimant to make good beyond the possibility of a doubt the claims he puts forth; that religion should be grounded on knowledge, not on faith.

Some indubitable demonstration by which men "may know" is the everlasting condition without which belief in any religious system is not a merit but a crime. The ready faith, declared by every religion to be a virtue as applied to itself, a fearful miscreance as applied to any other, is in reality the very gravest possible delinquency when given to any. The appalling fact that the vast bulk of the human race are, and have ever been, the victims of false religions, shows us what an awful, what a terrible, thing the yielding of an easy, unwarranted, and unjustified faith really is.

It is the usual contention of Christian writers that as the miracles wrought by Jesus were a proof of his credentials to those who beheld them, so the record of those miracles given here constitutes a valid claim upon our belief now. The proof given to these Scribes and multitudes by the cure of this palsy is, it is said, transmitted to us in this narrative. The proposition involved in this contention is in any strict sense not worthy of serious consideration. It needs no excessive scepticism on the subject of human testimony to feel that the difference between reading of a miracle and witnessing one is fundamental.

The record of a miracle is not a miracle. And without entering upon the question how far it is possible for human testimony to establish such an event, the melancholy unreliability of that testimony shown in all the false religions, and in the endless recorded miracles which no one attempts to believe, affords a perennial warning as to the evidential value of, and the credence due to, it. These considerations remain equally true whatever view may be taken of this or of any other given account of a miracle. Admitting the objective truth of what is here ascribed to Jesus; admitting the reality and sufficiency of the palsied man's palsy and the reality and permanence of the cure; also that no natural means could account for the sudden change; granting also that this account, as claimed, is from the hand of one of the disciples who was an eye-witness of it (though, as we shall presently see, Matthew was at the time still a publican not yet called, and that he nowhere

says he witnessed this or any other miracle), the case is to us in no way altered.

For us it remains an account of a miracle, and nothing more; we have absolutely no power of ascertaining or refuting the truth we have, by way of hypothesis, ascribed to it. Its inherent right to demand our faith is precisely the same as the inherent right of any other account of a miracle. The quantity of the testimony to a miracle or set of miracles, the quality of it, and the collateral reasons that may be urged in support, are considerations we need not enter into in this place. We will only just remark that in the first respect these Gospel miracles are startlingly weak; in the second about on a par, all things considered, with most other miracle-records; and in the third they have some points in their favour which Christians immensely exaggerate, and then—liberally blended with *petitio principii*—offer as convincing; and some points against them of a heavily adverse nature.

Whatever may have been the effect of the cure of this palsied man upon the Scribes to whom it was especially

7 And he arose, and departed to his house.

8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

addressed, but which our author characteristically omits to tell us, it made a great impression upon the multitudes, whom it caused to marvel and to glorify God. It is most disappointing to find that it was with this

multitude as with the other multitudes named in this Gospel. As with the whole peoples baptized by John, as with the other throngs surrounding Jesus everywhere, so with these Capernaum multitudes; we look for them afterwards and they are not there; they are not to be found. Even a trace of them is not to be found. In the very next chapter but one we find Jesus denouncing Capernaum, declaring that it—his own city—shall be brought down to hell for its non-appreciation of the mighty works he had wrought there. Surely the palsied man, his friends whose faith brought him to Jesus, and these multitudes who glorified God, will be excepted from that dread vengeance.

But were these multitudes not left under a vital misapprehension? "They glorified God which had given such power unto men." Unto men! Were they not apprised that it was the predicted Emmanuel who had done this deed? And how singular it seems that our author should write down the phrase "unto men" without comment. The essential truths, as they are now termed, of

Christianity were kept in the background a long time in this Gospel history.

This, Reader, was none other than our author himself. At any

9 ¶ And as Jesus
passed forth from
thence, he saw a man,
named Matthew, sitting
at the receipt of custom :
and he saith unto him,
Follow me. And he
arose, and followed him.

rate we are told so, though unhappily not by Matthew himself. "A man named Matthew."

What a phlegmatic man he must have been to quietly put down this passage about himself!

What a great pity it does seem and feel that he preserved his secret instead of assuring his

readers that he—the writer of this Gospel—was this same "man named Matthew"! How extremely interesting it would have been had Matthew here told us the kind of impression made by Jesus upon him; what kind of feeling it was that induced him or constrained him to throw down his papers and books and follow Jesus! We should then have felt we were receiving information at first hand; a feeling which this verse and this Gospel in no way give us.

Modesty is the reason usually assigned for this deplorable reticence of and this preservation of his anonymity by our author. Well, we all know how ill-timed it is possible for even a virtue to be. But never was a virtue more infelicitous than the modesty here displayed by Matthew. Besides, he considered his own call of sufficient importance to be worth specially recording, which he evidently did not think of the calling of most of the twelve. Modesty, like other qualities, can take many shapes. Our author records his own call, but does not say it was his own. What a very singular bit of demureness it was!

Into the general question of Matthew's authorship of this Gospel it forms no part of this work to enter. The precarious nature of the ascription which tells us that this Gospel is "according to" that apostle is well known; and there is only too much reason to fear that such ascription partakes of the nature of the word Saint prefixed to Matthew's name in our common copies, and which not all the terrors denounced against adding to Scripture have prevented pious souls from supplementing therewith.

Whatever may be the merits of the extraneous arguments for or against Matthew's authorship, it is a melancholy fact that there is nothing whatever in this Gospel to show that Matthew wrote it. The formal, impersonal style in which it is written and the entire absence of any personal testimony seem but little in accord with

the idea of his authorship. We shall not dwell upon this subject. But before we leave it there is one remark which in accordance with the main object of this work we feel bound to make. If this be Matthew's work it appears to us a grave failure of duty that he does not declare it to be so; that he does not openly avow that he personally beheld those portions of his record to which he was a witness; and also that he does not announce—if he were conscious of it—the fact of divine direction in the compilation of it. He does none of these. And be our offence what it may we here record our strong conviction that if Matthew wrote this Gospel he failed in his first, clearest, and paramount duty to his readers.

It would have been interesting to know whose house "the house" in which this gathering took place was. And what are we to understand by the curious term "sinners"? All the three parties here named, the publicans, these sinners, and the disciples themselves were all in a certain sense sinners. It would have been eminently desirable to know something more definite of the persons here specially designated by the—alas, universal—term sinners. Are apparently and outwardly respectable people, or open, depraved offenders meant? If a narrator does not choose to tell us things, it is but ill trying to find out his meaning afterwards.

In the next two Gospels an incident almost exactly resembling that of the preceding and the present verses is recorded saving that the publican called by Jesus is there named Levi. After being called by Jesus we read that "Levi made him a great feast in his own house," and that "there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them." If we follow the usual but very doubtful Christian practice of regarding Matthew and Levi as one and the same individual, we naturally come to the conclusion that our author must, judging from the nature and extent of his hospitality, have been in comfortable circumstances. One cannot help wondering what the great company of fellow-publicans Matthew invited to meet Jesus thought of him. How natural it seems to be to hope that Jesus "called" them also; but how little ground also there is to think it probable he did!

The sitting down and taking meat with publicans and sinners on the part of Jesus was a surprise to these strict Jews; and if we only try to be fair and just to

10 ¶ And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

11 And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they

said unto his disciples
Why eateth your Master
with publicans and sin-
ners?

12 But when Jesus
heard *that*, he said unto
them, They that be
whole need not a physi-
cian, but they that are
sick.

these men we shall very clearly see why it was so. The publicans were the conspicuous representatives of the Roman yoke; the galling reminders of foreign domination, and the grievous and very practical exemplification of what that domination meant. How could such

men fail to be hateful to every patriotic Israelite? Would not such men be hateful to a lover of his country anywhere? And if Jews ignobly accepted such offices as our author and others had done, how can we wonder that they were objects of peculiar dislike and aversion? "Let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican" is a saying of Jesus himself.

Then with regard to sitting down to meat with sinners. Accepting the view that by sinners open evil-doers are here meant, who can fail to see the eminently two-sided nature of such an act? Who can fail to see the ambiguous nature of the act if practised now? Every father yet justly and wisely teaches his son to shun evil-doers. And though it is a duty also to do all we can to reclaim evil-doers and bring them back to a better life, personal association with them must ever remain a difficult problem even to the most kindly disposed of men. The notion that zeal may dispense with discretion in philanthropic efforts is so far from well-founded that the opposite idea is nearer the truth. In no kind of human effort are practical good sense and sobriety more needed than in philanthropy of every sort.

On learning what these Pharisees thought of his associating and taking meat with sinners and publicans, Jesus made the remark here given. It is an observation simple and true in itself, but one which strongly illustrates the dangers and difficulties attendant upon all figures of speech. The "whole" and the "sick" and how we are to understand those terms in a spiritual sense raise a problem of no small importance; and if we did not possess the warnings of experienced theologians not to press the simile too far there is reason to fear it might lead many into serious misunderstandings. The obvious and happy fact that the physically sick are but a small proportion in any community is only one of the many features of this simile that might readily lead us into hazardous or even entirely mistaken spiritual inferences. The "whole" who "need not a physician" might not unnaturally lead us into even more perilous deductions still.

“Go ye and learn what that meaneth.” In saying this Jesus

13 But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

did not point out to whom these critics were to go for authentic information, nor in what other way they were to get at the true meaning of this Scripture. If he meant them to go and study for themselves the meaning

of this passage we do not feel sure that their success was certain. The main result of pondering holy writ has been to set men at strife with each other as to what it does mean. The attempt to learn what some of Jesus' own sayings mean has cost mankind very dear.

The mercies of Jehovah, and the sacrifices he exacted, are both set forth at much length in the Jewish Scriptures. Which are the more singular and astonishing, the mercies or the sacrifices, every reader must decide for himself. To this Scripture quotation Jesus adds a very striking statement, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

The admission that there were righteous men in the world when Jesus came to it, men to whom he did not address, and did not need to address, a call to repentance has greatly perplexed commentators. The idea that there were good, wise, humane, and righteous men before Jesus brought those virtues from heaven, is an idea that sorely vexes pious souls. The impertinent claim to righteousness and religion being inseparable has however received too many refutations in both directions, righteousness without religion, and religion without righteousness, to make the conceit now worth considering.

Nothing strikes one closely considering these Gospels from an outsider's standpoint more strongly than the way in which so many accretions of Christian theology are not only unwarranted by, but run quite counter to, what these Gospels themselves set forth. The supposed pious notion that there were no righteous men before Jesus showed men how to be so, has led many to declare that in saying he did not come to call the righteous to repentance Jesus spoke ironically. Far be it from us to say that Jesus never spoke ironically. To us there are not a few of his sayings that so regarded would be vastly improved. Still the expedient of taking a religious founder's declarations in an ironical sense, in spite of its occasional and undeniable convenience, is one that opens so wide a door, as to be best let alone.

Poor John was still in prison as we shall find a little further on

14 ¶ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

Did he send these disciples of his on this errand, as we read he afterwards sent them on another and more important message of inquiry; or did these disciples come of their own accord? If the former was the case and we possess the whole of Jesus' reply, that reply cannot be regarded as very sympathetic. There are some who think it a very frigid one.

The disciples of John! Has not this a very strange sound, Reader? Had not John declared that he, John, was not worthy to unloose Jesus' shoe; that he was a mere preparer and forerunner? And yet John retains disciples of his own who here come and question Jesus in a very surprising way; and who are sent by John himself a little later on with quite a staggering inquiry to be put to Jesus.

The immediate cause of this visit of John's disciples is to ascertain why the disciples of Jesus do no fasting. Such flouting of the proprieties grieved the souls of these men, and they come to have it explained. "Why do we fast oft?" is a question which we think Christians will scarcely censure us for smiling at. It is not clear whether these disciples of John complained of their own fasting or were proud of it; but it is clear they could not understand why Jesus' disciples did not fast also. Why should following Jesus be easier and pleasanter than following John?

Apart from his one fast in the wilderness which he neither here nor elsewhere alludes to, it is evident Jesus did not practise fasting, for he tells us he came "eating and drinking," and was accused by his enemies of wine-bibbing and gluttony. And by way of reply to these disciples of John, he adverts to a wedding custom of the Jews, and compares himself to the bridegroom thereat, whose presence or absence determines fasting or otherwise.

What bearing the declarations contained in these two verses have upon the matter in hand we cannot make out.

16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine

The references to old bottles and old garments and to new cloth and new wine offer a wide field of conjecture to anyone disposed to enter it. Taken in their natural sense the wisdom contained in these verses is to be found set forth in numerous proverbs, ancient

runneth out, and the bottles perish : but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

and modern, declaring the folly of attempts to unite the incompatible.

It is not stated if these disciples of John were satisfied with their interview with Jesus and with the answer they obtained from him. If they were they cannot be considered exacting. It is unfortunately not our author's custom to give any rejoinder made to Jesus' answers. He might have made an exception in this case. For these were John's disciples ; not any of those pious wicked Pharisees who so often, or those incredulous Sadducees who sometimes came to question Jesus. It would have been interesting to know if these disciples of John applied the bridegroom argument in their own case. For their Master though in prison, was yet alive ; but he was soon to be taken from them, and in a way that called for much fasting on his disciples' part. There is nothing in this incident to throw any light upon the merit of the Pharisees' fasts. It was an accomplishment in which, as here stated, and as we know from other sources more particularly, they greatly excelled ; a feat in which it would be no easy matter for the disciples of John or of Jesus or for anyone else to rival them.

A miracle is now recorded resembling in some of its features that of the centurion and his servant. "A

18 ¶ While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead : but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

certain ruler" whose daughter was dead or dying came to beseech Jesus to come and restore her ; which Jesus, accompanied by his disciples, at once proceeded to do.

The narrative however is interrupted in order to record another miracle that took place by the way as Jesus was going to the ruler's house. "An issue of blood twelve years," is an ailment not easy

20 ¶ And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment :

21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

to identify. This incident is given at much greater length in the two next Gospels, where we are told this woman "had suffered many things of many physicians," and according to Luke—himself a physician—"had spent all her living upon physicians." The touch of Jesus' garment operated instantly ; and apparently without knowledge or concurrence on Jesus' part. For we read that he asked "Who touched my clothes ?" "Somebody hath

touched me for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." In the book of the Acts, we read that aprons and handkerchiefs which had touched Paul's body were taken to sick people and cured their diseases, and further that the aprons in question ejected devils even. Even Peter's shadow effected like wonders! From all which we learn that miracle power can be delegated to very humble things, and can take full effect without any conscious personal effort on the part of anyone. The marvels wrought for centuries by the relics and bones of saints, show us that even death does not terminate this astonishing virtue.

On arriving at the ruler's house, Jesus found those singular

23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

24 He said unto them, Give place : for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

noisy proceedings with which most Orientals proclaimed their grief at a death, going on. The stillness, the subdued air, and solemn quietude which mark everything connected with death amongst the higher types of mankind, and which now feel so appropriate thereto are a refinement of comparatively late evolution in our race. Savages are always found to be very tumultuous and demonstrative on occasion of death.

The declaration of Jesus that the maid was not dead, but only slept, has put commentators to much inconvenience, for if we take the statement in its natural sense, the miracle supposed to be wrought in the case disappears. If the maid were really dead, how could Jesus say she "is not dead"? If people, instead of using plain speech, will use ambiguous and tiresome figures of speech, it is a just and righteous penalty that they should be unintelligible.

The people about were evidently quite satisfied of the reality of the maid's death. Be this as it may, Jesus either awoke the maid, or summoned back her soul from wheresoever it may have wended its way. With this restoration of the maid, these people were duly impressed and in the usual manner spread Jesus' fame over all the land. It does not appear that this ruler and his revived daughter, these minstrels and spectators took any more definite measures to aid the new cause. All the vast fame of Jesus seems to have resulted in marvellously little Christianity. Christianity seems indeed to have flourished in something like inverse proportion to the wonders wrought in its aid. The entire absence in early

Christian history of all those whom Jesus had freed from devils, raised from the dead, and restored to sight, to hearing, and to health is most disheartening. Something approaching to indignation even is stirred as we think of all this.

On his way from, as well as to, the ruler's house Jesus also wrought a miracle. This time it was upon two blind men who followed him, saluting him by the noticeable title, Son of David, and begging for mercy. Jesus postponed compliance until he came into "the house" into which the blind men followed him. Jesus then asks them if they believe him able to do what they wish; to which they reply they do. Thereupon Jesus touches their eyes, accompanying the act with the peculiar saying, "According to your faith be it unto you." Their faith proved to be equal to the occasion, for their eyes were opened.

Contingent miracles are not satisfactory. In this case the result was nominally dependant not upon Jesus' touch, but upon these blind men's subjective faith. Had in either of the two men the necessary mental attitude been wanting, Jesus' touch would have been of non-effect. In reality, however, Jesus knew quite well when he asked the question that these two men possessed the requisite faith. In reality there was no unknown element in the case at all; the apparent contingency was non-existent. We have only to picture to ourselves Jesus touching the eyes of some blind man who had not the requisite faith and whose eyes would consequently remain closed—if it be possible to imagine anything so inane—to feel that a contingent miracle is a contingent myth, or at least a mythical contingency.

As in preceding instances, Jesus straitly charged these lately blind men to see that "no man" know it. He was, however, well aware that they would disobey him in this matter, and would commit the amiable sin of spreading his fame in "all that country." The reasons of Jesus for wishing secrecy in such matters are not now discoverable, and were evidently unintelligible to these once blind men also.

What a terrible shock it must have been to these two men, to the

27 ¶ And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, *Thou son of David, have mercy on us.*

28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* They said unto him, *Yea, Lord.*

29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, *According to your faith be it unto you.*

30 And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, *See that no man know it.*

31 But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

centurion and his servant, the ruler and his daughter, the leper, the palsied man, and the vast numbers who had been cured of "every sickness and every disease" by him, to hear some twelve months or two years hence that Jesus had been crucified at Jerusalem for being a blasphemer and a pretended King of the Jews. On the other hand, what splendid ground the theatre of all these marvels, where Jesus' fame had been spread abroad again and again, and where the living subjects and spectators of his miracles abounded, ought to have been for the propagation of Christianity. But it met with little success there. Not in those places he had so honoured with his presence, but in those where Jesus had never been seen, was it that Christianity met with any real success.

A miracle of another type is now laid before us—the ejection of

32 ¶ As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

33 And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

34 But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

a devil out of a dumb man. We frankly own to feeling some indignation as we read these verses. For in spite of the pleas that the case here dealt with might be a special and peculiar one, the inference and insinuation that devilism and dumbness stand in relation of cause and effect are unmistakable. And who, looking upon our dumb fellow men, women, and children around us, at their inoffensiveness and their privation, can read

such matter without utter loathing? Nor is the subject in any way improved by reflecting that the exorcist in this case, was by hypothesis, the Creator of both the dumb man and of the devil. The Pharisees' explanation of the achievement we reserve to another occasion where we meet with it at greater length.

A verse almost identical with this we met with in an early

35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

chapter. The Gospel of the Kingdom still retains its indefiniteness. Those high mystic and personal claims that later on led to Jesus' martyrdom had not yet been broached. Even the main fact that he was the Messiah was still a secret whose disclosure was forbidden.

To our thinking the systematic wonder-working that Jesus was at this time displaying far and wide is even preferable to the full-blossomed Christianity that emerged later on. Surely preaching and teaching accompanied by such wonders must have been mighty and effectual. Instead of that it

was barren and profitless; and we shall very soon find Jesus lamenting the non-effect of his mighty works, and denouncing terrible vengeance therefor. We wonder what preaching so accompanied in these days would do. We cannot think we could be the "perverse" generation the men of Jesus' time proved to be. But, unhappily, there does not now exist a believer who possesses faith equal to a grain of mustard seed to put us to the test.

The multitudes Jesus here saw were but as a drop in the ocean compared with the vast multitudes of neglected human beings outside Jesus' earthly itinerary. For countless centuries he had looked down from heaven upon those vast and perishing multitudes, with compassion it may be, but certainly not with active and effective compassion. The idea here placed before us,—Omnipotence deploring an unsatisfactory state of things,—is one that we have not the capacity, Reader, to so much as make an attempt to understand.

Harvests of human beings are like harvests of every other produce, ever coming and ever going; in a continual transition, appearing and disappearing, always being displaced and replaced. The particular human harvest that at this time lay before the eye of Jesus had been preceded by countless other harvests concerning whose religious destiny a most significant silence is preserved; and which indeed is, from any religious standpoint, far best undwelt upon. Until this visit of Jesus, any compassion felt for the human race in heaven had been of an abstract, not an active, kind. Not only had mankind not been illumined with the true religion, they had been suffered to become the victims of huge false systems, which yet they in the main continue to be. The harvest of the human race, in any religious sense whatever, is a frightful thought; and it is a magnificent feature of non-belief that to it that fearful problem is altogether non-existent.

"The labourers are few." The many priesthoods who shepherded the Gentiles could, it is clear, not be considered as labourers in Jesus' harvest. Even his Father's priests in Judea, so far from labouring for him, laboured to thwart him, and were the main instruments in bringing his earthly career to its early close. It is one of the many curious pictures the Judeo-Christian religion calls

36 ¶ But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

upon us to realize, that the priests of the first person of the Trinity were the bitter enemies of the second.

Commentators assure us that the passage before us in these three verses is a very fine one and a very pathetic one. We are obliged, Reader, in accordance with the purpose of this work to say that we are not able to concur in that view, but are compelled to totally dissent from it.

Kindly feeling and compassion towards others with a desire and an effort to help them are always admirable. Even mere pity, where there is no power to help, is not unpleasing. But pity with power to help not exerted, so far from being admirable, calls forth the very opposite feeling. Now what is the real state of the case as here brought before us? On the one hand, by admission, neglected perishing multitudes; on the other, by hypothesis, a Being able to give full help and to give it at once. But instead of this being done, Jesus bids his disciples to pray for helpers to be sent. And to whom are they to pray? To the "Lord of the Harvest," in other words, to Jesus himself. Whilst this tedious process is going on, souls are perishing, and brands that might have been plucked from the burning are consumed. Now all this may possibly, Reader, be very fine and very pious. Those who are able so to regard it, do quite right in saying so. But those who are not able so to regard it have no right to pretend an admiration they cannot feel; and there rests upon them that obligation to speak only that which feels to be true which rests upon all men at all times. Hence there remains to us nothing but to candidly declare that the process here prescribed by Jesus as that by which an adequate staff of labourers is to be obtained for the human harvest is an insipid and time-wasting one; and one that was obviously, and has proved itself, a lamentably ineffective and inadequate one also.

The labourers in the human harvest—the genuine ones we mean, for of false labourers there have ever been but too many—have always been utterly inadequate to the work. And does it seem fair to the perishing masses to make their salvation dependent upon the prayers of certain of their fellow mortals for a sufficient increase in the staff of workers? However this may be, the plain fact is in front of us that the voluntary initiative of Jesus himself and the prayers of his followers have both proved entirely and deplorably inadequate to the furnishing of anything approaching a sufficient staff of labourers for the human harvest.

MATTHEW X.

UP to this time only five of these twelve disciples have been named,

CHAPTER X.

1 *Christ sendeth out his twelve apostles, enabling them with power to do miracles, 5 giveth them their charge, teacheth them, 16 comforteth them against persecutions: 40 and promiseth a blessing to those that receive them.*

1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddæus;

4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

our author himself being the fifth. Those five are the only ones whose calling is specially recorded. The way in which the other seven were met with and selected is not stated. Who can help wondering when and how one of those seven—the twelfth and last—was added? The number of brothers in this list—two if not three pairs—tends to give it a narrow, restricted aspect. Some enthusiastic believers have tried, from the slender materials available, to show us that eleven of these twelve men were eminently suitable and representative men, happily adapted for the purpose; but the attempts are not much of a success.

The post of honour is given to Peter. Some think this arose from his being the first to be called. It is also commonly supposed that he was the eldest, which, if true, would make his chiefship natural and becoming. It is, indeed, not uncommon to find Peter now represented in books and pictures as at this time an elderly or even venerable man; though for the notion

that he was much older than the other disciples, there is no discoverable ground. One of the twelve was Peter's own brother, a fact which, though not inconsistent with much disparity of years, more naturally leads us to think otherwise; whilst the fact that his mother-in-law was living, would seem to show that Peter probably belonged to the same generation as Jesus himself.

Whether the list as here given is in any order, either of age, or time of calling, or merit, must remain a point of ungratified curiosity. It certainly begins with the chief and ends with the traitor; but the relative positions of the intermediate ones cannot be determined. Our author places himself eighth on the list.

The last name in the list gives rise to most painful reflections. The calling of Judas is indeed a grim subject. All efforts we can make to picture to ourselves that summons being given by Jesus are unendurable. The selection of a traitor, well knowing he

would prove such, is another illustration of the fact that in many respects the example of Jesus is not a suitable one for human imitation.

Much has been written concerning the number—twelve—of Jesus' inner circle. His own allusions show that it had reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, and was designed to correspond thereto. That the disciples themselves attached importance to the particular number twelve, is shown by the way in which they proceeded to fill up the vacancy made by the defection of Judas. The very mundane way—casting lots—in which they did so is not a little astonishing. As intimate companions, twelve seems a large and somewhat unwieldy number.

That miracle-power which we have already seen Jesus everywhere exerting, he now proceeds to confer upon these twelve Apostles. He gave them, or gave us—as Matthew, but for his modesty, might have put it—power against unclean spirits, and power to heal all kinds of sickness and disease. What a fine possession, what a delightful sensation that power must have been ! What a pity our author does not give us a few words descriptive of it !

Having endowed these twelve with miracle-power, Jesus sends them forth on an extensive mission. Before their departure Jesus gives them an address which extends to the end of this chapter ; and an astonishing deliverance it assuredly is. Christianity is displayed to our gaze unreservedly ; and if, as some may think, its loveliness is not unqualified, let us remember that candour is always a virtue.

In the first place, Jesus charges these Apostles not to go near the Gentiles, nor even the mixed Samaritans. It was a mission exclusively to the children of Israel. The hour had not yet arrived for the calling of the Gentiles, as Christians term it ; that casting of the children's bread to dogs, as Jesus himself elsewhere puts it. The task of discriminating the pure Israelites would not always be an easy one in the "cities" and "towns" accessible to these twelve ; and there is reason to hope that, by a happy accident, an occasional Gentile may have been unintentionally gathered in.

But though the sharp line of demarcation laid down in this injunction may not have a very pleasant look with it, and though

5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not :

6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

the carrying it out would necessitate a sorting and a passing by of human souls not altogether agreeable, the general principle of beginning a good work at home and among one's own is a sound one. In pursuance of this principle, it would have been most pleasant to read that Jesus' own brethren and sisters, whose attitude towards him so surprises us, had first of all been gathered into the fold.

It thus appears that the conversion of the Jews had to precede—or at any rate was intended to precede—that of the Gentiles. But the portentous fact that heavenly designs, like our poor human ones, are liable to miscarry we know but too well. How often Jehovah had occasion to lament the frustration of his intentions, even to the extent of “repenting” him of having essayed them, the Jewish Scriptures very candidly apprise us.

So here, like all subsequent efforts to Christianize the Jews, this first one, though assisted by unstinted miracle-power, was a failure. The children of Israel were not to be moved from the faith of their fathers. Even portents of all kinds, from casting out devils to raising the dead, availed naught either to attract them or alarm them into the embracing of the new faith.

John, as we know, had already made this announcement. And though he had for some time past been precluded from personally continuing his work, his disciples must have been engaged in disseminating their Master's message. This declaration would, therefore, not be news, unless the twelve went into districts not reached by John and his disciples. It is, too, much to be feared that the tidings of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven would not leave any very decided or vivid impression, unless that amiable phrase were followed up with some few details, enabling men to recognize its meaning.

To heal the sick and cleanse the lepers was a worthy errand indeed. The merit of casting out devils seems to us to entirely depend upon where the devils went to when cast out. If they had the power to re-enter, or to enter into other human beings, we do not see the gain of the proceeding. And we can feel no sympathy whatsoever with sending them into swine.

But far the most peculiar clause in these instructions, is the command to raise the dead. As a general rule, we should say this

7 And as ye go,
preach, saying, The
kingdom of heaven is at
hand.

8 Heal the sick,
cleanse the lepers, raise
the dead, cast out
devils: freely ye have
received, freely give.

is an eminently undesirable thing to do. It does not, indeed, appear whether this power was confined to raising the recently dead only, or extended to the far-off and long-since dead also. But in any case the step seems a very doubtful one. To call back the righteous from Elysium to this vale of tears seems cruel; whilst to call back the occupants of a certain other place, though possibly a temporary kindness to them, is obviously not to be desired from an earthly standpoint. Nor in its purely natural aspect is bringing back the dead to be desired. It might often be, it often would be, greatly to be wished that men should not die when they do; but once dead, it would be inexpedient and undesirable that they should reappear.

All these achievements were to be freely exercised; and the twelve must surely have produced some very striking changes in the various places they visited.

Having given the twelve the mighty gifts already enumerated, Jesus adds some instructions of a merely natural kind. No gold, silver, or brass was to be taken in their "purses." It is to be presumed these purses would be replenished as occasion arose. To men possessed of miracle-power, ways and means do not seem a very formidable difficulty. For though not named in the list of delegated powers given above, the power of finding a coin when needed, and the power of extemporizing bread and meat and wine, may not unnaturally be supposed to have been included by Jesus among the greater powers specially mentioned.

We can form but a vague estimate of the duration of this mission. We meet with these Apostles again in what seems a short time. If this be so, the necessity for scrip, two coats, and shoes was not, perhaps, pressing; and yet it is difficult to picture this expedition as accomplished in such a short period as to make those articles not requisite. This mission, like so many Gospel occurrences, turns out to be a remarkably hazy event.

Though this was a mission to the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel, operations were to be commenced in any city or town by inquiring who therein was worthy. That word "Inquire" seems to us brimful of suggestiveness. All miraculous narratives that we have met with—and we have perused a goodly number—have the common feature of com-

9 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses.

10 Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

11 And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.

binning great ostensible miracle capacity with, in the same person, the use of the most humble of human appliances, and the most time-taking expedients for doing and ascertaining minor things.

This was a curious inquiry to make in any town. In most cities and towns much difference of opinion prevails as to who therein are worthy; and these apostles were very fortunate if they did not often receive conflicting and sometimes unreliable information. And though these apostles, like their Master, were come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, the preference of the former for abiding with during their stay in any place, seems to us a very sensible one. Even amongst worthy people the virtue of hospitality varies greatly; and the injunction to abide with these worthy folks argues—if we exclude supernatural agency—a willingness to receive strangers that could scarcely always be counted upon.

The nature of this salutation is not clear; an ordinary greeting can scarcely be meant. The credentials borne by these apostles, if shown, would be an effective passport indeed. In houses where there may have been sick or afflicted ones or resident devils, their salutation would be a welcome one.

The contingency, even after inquiry, of getting into a house not worthy is also dealt with. What a very small exercise of miracle power would, one would think, have sufficed to avoid that very unpleasant and time-wasting experience.

The nature of the peace brought into families by these evangelists is graphically described by Jesus towards the end of this chapter; and it is of a kind to make us think that houses not honoured by a visit from these apostles were most fortunate.

Here, Reader, we have Christianity in all its beauty. Its loving-kindness, its charity, its tender mercy, and its sweet philanthropy, are here depicted in its author's own words. He commissions his disciples to go amongst men with the message, Believe, or we will send you to a fate compared with which that of the vile criminals of Sodom shall be more tolerable. This, Reader, is the famous religion of Love.

Bearing in mind the foregoing verses, we think the terms sheep

16 ¶ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

and wolves as here used would be much nearer the mark were they reversed. Men who go amongst their fellow-men with an evangel to the effect that if it be not accepted, they—the evangelists—will shake the dust off their feet

and consign those who do not obey their summons to hell, can scarcely be considered sheep. At any rate, the men thus consigned by these evangelists may well wonder where the sheep-like qualities come in.

Another simile taken from the animal kingdom is added by Jesus for the guidance of these apostles. They were to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” The wisdom of the serpent was one of those many Oriental superstitions regarding the qualities of animals that so surprise us; for but little observation of that reptile was needed to confute the groundless compliment. The regarding of the crocodile as a holy animal on the part of one great ancient nation; and the selection by “my people Israel” of a calf as a suitable object of worship were scarcely more astonishing illusions than the supposed wisdom of the serpent. Besides, as the Creator of that animal, Jesus well knew its true qualities; and to stamp with his own utterance something so groundless is calculated to startle us. It may just be observed, however, that happily we in these latter times have been relieved from the necessity of considering the “creation” of wolves and serpents. The designing, planning, and creating of carnivora, reptiles, and vermin generally, formed one of those old “difficulties,” the happy dissipation of which must surely be to Christians no small consolation for the havoc which Science has wrought from time to time upon certain inspired documents.

A combination of the serpent and the dove is thought by many to be a mournfully appropriate symbol of Christianity as a system; and a painfully expressive summary of its history in the world. During the many centuries when Christianity consisted almost solely of a great and powerful organization, which, though now greatly dwarfed, is yet its principal representative, the qualities denoted by the first of the two animals named were much to the front. One branch of that organization, known by the name of the Inquisition, was of a nature in some respects that the likening it to a serpent is hardly fair to that animal. Even the smaller fragments of Christendom have not been wanting when they had the power,

in the exhibition of some viperous qualities. Adversity has had its oftentimes chastening and softening influence upon Christianity. In these latter ages, in its reduced circumstances and disjointed condition, it is set forth as nearly all dove.

“Beware of men.” A much-needed warning. Those who under-

17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

take to disturb and molest an existing religion have need to beware. Even attempts to vary or modify religious beliefs are attended with no little stirrings up of ill-feeling. And in modern times, and in countries where the human mind has achieved its complete freedom from religious terrorism, the peculiar animosity still discernible in religious antagonisms may,

to a slight degree, serve to remind us what such conflicts must have been in times past. When fanaticism met fanaticism the result was appalling.

As Jesus used the words, “they will deliver you up to the councils,” he could hardly help looking forward to the curious reversal of the picture which time was destined to bring forth. For century after century, Jews were brought before Christian councils and treated with shocking cruelties. Of what value a few clear words might here have been. But the ominous silences of Jesus are more perplexing than his most difficult sayings.

Synagogues do not at any time seem to have been particularly attractive places. The administration of personal chastisement for heresy therein would not tend to the promotion of agreeable associations around them from any point of view. How far these apostles experienced the scourgings here predicted we have no means of learning. It is painful to reflect that Jesus himself experienced that treatment just before his death. Yes, Reader, according to trinitarian Christianity, God himself was once punished for heresy.

When these apostles found themselves arrested and brought before legal tribunals, they were to take no thought what they should say; they were to be entirely passive, and Heaven would use their lips for its own utterances.

19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

We are not much impressed with this arrangement. The utterances of Heaven—a very large number of which are so happily in our

possession—are not outwardly different from human utterances.

And though, as many declare, inwardly heavenly utterances reveal their Divine character, it is admittedly often only after careful and prayerful study. Many, indeed, are those who after a careful, if not prayerful, study, have been forced to own that to them the distinction between human and Divine speech is inwardly, not less than outwardly, undiscernible. For ourselves, we are bound to own, Reader, that in the Jewish Scriptures we constantly read, "Thus saith the Lord," only to find that he said nothing but what any ordinary person might have said; and that not seldom is that prefix found to sayings of a very shocking kind. These tribunals would have no certain means of knowing that what these apostles said came from so high a source; whereas the mere presence of a single angel by their side would have made the true state of things clear to all parties. Is there any harm in wondering whether when Jews were trembling before Christian councils, it was also given them of their Father what they should speak?

In this dreadful verse, Reader, we have religious strife and savagery, and their results set before us without cloak or veil. There is no mincing matters here. The introduction of the new evangel into a house and its work in the home are laid before us in vigorous terms. The terrible consequences, the inevitable horrors which attempts to establish a new religion entail are vividly depicted in this frightful passage.

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death.

In ages when religious beliefs had a vitality they nowhere now possess, religious differences meant war to the knife. Rival faiths beheld each other with a deadly hatred. It was felt, and it was declared, that earthly offences of the worst type were as nothing compared to false doctrine which jeopardized men's everlasting souls. What then so clear, and what so urgent, as the duty to extirpate an erroneous belief and enforce the true one? An irrefutable position now as ever if there really be a true faith, and we could be certain which of them it is; two conditions men have often satisfied themselves they were certain of, with results such as those Jesus here describes.

In these days when the great majority of men are either without religious belief altogether, or are indifferent to all beliefs, or make a nominal profession of one of very numerous varieties; when even earnest believers have ceased to believe many things their predecessors of the same name believed, and as a rule teach the better

parts of their faith only, it is difficult to realize or to imagine the state of thought and feeling necessary to produce the condition of things pictured in this verse.

“And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death.” Jesus enumerates these horrors as calmly as though their prevention or termination was not possible; and without a word of comment. And yet, by hypothesis, without his express permission these very things could never have occurred. It is enough to make anyone stand aghast who can make any approach to realizing the theory, which we much doubt if it be now possible for anyone to do.

It is a melancholy thing for us to think of that the declaration of the true religion should have caused those declaring it to be hated of all men. We do not think men generally gave themselves that trouble. It may be some little consolation that eleven out of the twelve endured it all to the end, which would appear from the next verse to have been an event not far distant.

This does not seem very heroic advice. This exhortation to “flee” from danger does not accord very well with the supernatural assistance promised when brought before governors and kings, which would have remained a dead letter if persecution were always escaped. To flee from a city when persecution threatened cannot be called a brave line of action. It is only just to own that many of the most eminent of the followers of Jesus have, when faced with persecution, heroically stood their ground, covered their faith with honour, and in many cases rendered thereby very great indirect service to our race.

If these apostles when persecuted always fled, the cities of Israel would soon be “gone over.” The completion of that task, however, Jesus declared shall not have been effected “till the Son of Man be come.” Unless it be allowable to doubt whether the twelve ever completed the going over the cities of Israel; if that task were ever really finished, then the Son of Man must be come. We are quite at a loss to know what we ought to understand by this declaration. As with other “difficulties”

22 And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

Christian commentators spoil themselves by having far too many "solutions."

Subordinates are in most matters looked upon not with more but

24 The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord.

25 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household?

with less aversion or admiration, as the case may be, than principals. In religious innovation, as in treason, and other things that stir admiration and resentment strongly, praise and antipathy usually diminish downwards from principals to the rank and file. If Jesus had been called Beelzebub by his enemies his followers could not be more aspersed.

Any connection between this great promise and what precedes it is not perceptible. A tremendous promise

26 Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

it veritably is. Nothing is to remain covered, everything is to be revealed; nothing is to remain hidden, but everything is to be made known. But this promise seems to become

more and more vague, the more we look at it. Revealed and known; but where, when, and to whom? To all men or only to some?

There was one secret however, and that the main and central one, which these apostles were not to make known.

27 What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the housetops.

Long after this we shall find Jesus forbidding these same disciples to tell any man that he was the Christ. How these apostles could at this time, therefore, go about disseminating

Christianity with the great fact on which it rests left out is very puzzling. Indeed it is most difficult to decipher what it was that in this mission the Jews were so peremptorily called on to believe upon pain of a worse fate than that awaiting the inhabitants of Sodom. They already believed in all the Scripture then in existence. They believed in Jehovah, the first person in the Trinity; and their Scriptures had certainly never led them to imagine—if the expression be allowable—that there were more; that Jehovah was a triune Being, a fact which it may well be doubted if these apostles themselves were aware of. Jesus, too, as we have seen, was quite disposed to sanction and comply with their many ceremonies. Then what was it these apostles summoned them to believe? There is only one point of importance we can conjecture. Owing to the extraordinary silence of their Scriptures upon the

point, Jewish belief in a future life after death was shadowy even when it existed at all. The Christian heaven and Christian hell would certainly be new institutions to them ; but until the Christian scheme of redemption was disclosed how was the former to be reached and the latter shunned ? So long as these apostles were not in a position to disclose who their master really was the demand made upon these Jews scarcely seems a fair one.

These disciples doubtless carried out this command of Jesus. Still it is very remarkable that in the book of Acts where their subsequent proceedings are recorded, and in the letters of some of these apostles that we possess, scarcely a single item of any kind that we might have expected they would have ascertained from Jesus "in the ear" and "in darkness" is made known ; nothing beyond what is already known to us from these Gospels being there disclosed.

On the whole, we think Jesus' previous advice to "beware of men,"

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

if not to flee, is the better. No doubt to have the body destroyed is but a trifle compared with the destruction or consignment to hell of both body and soul. But destruction of the body is sufficiently inconvenient and serious to

make caution very desirable. When a soul leaves a body its power for further usefulness to us is lost. On this ground the world is greatly interested in discouraging the premature or avoidable departure of good souls. Courting death and pushing on to martyrdom for heaven's sake, are selfish, ungenerous things. Those who feel that temptation ought to reflect what an irreparable loss yielding to it inflicts upon those left behind.

The attention of Jehovah to the affairs of our planet is so minute

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

that not a sparrow falls to the ground without him. It seems a very great pity that the sentence is left so incomplete. Does it mean without his knowledge, his permission, or his approval ? We have already observed that we

are now relieved from the necessity of thinking that the dreadful spectacle and system of animated Nature, one species preying upon and often torturing another, were planned and designed. We need no longer think that the claws of the cat were shaped and polished, and the beak of the hawk specially "adapted" to be thrust into the eyes and the flesh of sparrows ; and that the toying with and

torturing of its prey before finally disposing of it were an addition to the arrangement specially "implanted." We have now a far better and far more satisfactory explanation of how all these things have come about than "Creation" ever offered. We can now trace throughout all Nature the workings by which during immeasurable periods of time these strange adaptations have been evolved.

Those so disposed may, of course, believe that Jehovah watched and superintended the strange history of animated beings disclosed in the geological records of our planet. How far his superintendence involves interference now we do not know, and Jesus unfortunately does not in this passage state. Observation shows us that he still sees his cats torture his sparrows without intervention; and also, we grieve to say, watches vivisectors operate upon dogs without interfering.

Our obligation to treat all sentient things kindly and humanely is, in the main, a modern sentiment which is, however, now deeply felt by all the best human natures. In the case of animals that yield us noble service this obligation is more especially binding; and cruelty to them is in some respects more hateful even than cruelty to ourselves. The human brutes who for a paltry economy pack sheep and poultry for transit into spaces which must mean black-holes of Calcutta deserve to be themselves so treated. And we do not hesitate to add that the vivisector who works upon the flesh and muscles of a living dog in the honoured name of scientific research, does more to injure some of the most valuable and precious of human feelings than any discoveries from so ignoble a source can ever atone for.

We here learn still more markedly the very close and even micro-

³⁰ But the very hairs
of your head are all
numbered.

copic attention given by heaven to human affairs. But possibly this was an exceptional case; it might be a rash inference that the hairs of non-

believers' heads are also numbered. We read of an Eastern God that he counts the twinklings of our eyes. Such expressions hardly tend to give us an exalted notion of a Deity, however flattering they may be thought to be to humanity.

But this absorbing celestial interest in human affairs seems to have been invidious and capricious. Up to this time it had apparently been confined to Judea. Eastward of where Jesus made this assertion were vast multitudes of human beings whose heads

and whose souls, much less whose hairs do not up to this time seem to have had much heavenly attention. So too of the peoples northward and southward. Amongst those westward there had been, and then were, some exceedingly fine types of humanity who, however, were left by heaven to spiritual darkness, though in other respects they were much more enlightened than "my people Israel" despite the celestial irradiation of the latter.

There is no difficulty in agreeing with this declaration ; though there was one of the twelve whose "value" could hardly be assessed at any great number even of sparrows.

31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

The usual declaration of religious founders. It is very significant and very striking that these founders rely so much upon what they declare they will do to poor mortals after death. For their jurisdiction upon our globe is equally complete ; and how potent would be its influence for good if seen at work here ! But here all natural things befall to believers and unbelievers alike.

32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Churches like theatres are burnt down, and the inmates of both trampled to death. Missionary boats, like pleasure boats, go to the bottom and take their occupants with them. The lightning conductor that climbs up the spire of a fine church and preserves the cross that surmounts it from being splintered during a storm is a touching reminder that we cannot rely upon heaven's protection even of the things most dear and pleasing to it. Believers and unbelievers of all kinds fare alike here. Both are stricken with disease, and both often carried to a premature grave ; and both are often blessed with health and prosperity, and live to be full of years.

Judgment upon us, therefore, does not take place here ; it is deferred to another world. Much doubt and uncertainty prevail, too, owing to the contradictory looking assertions we meet with on the subject, as to whether each individual is adjudicated upon at death, or the fate of our entire race is reserved to a great universal judgment day. We cannot, therefore, feel sure whether our departed friends are already enjoying the felicity or suffering the torture due to their belief or non-belief respectively, or whether the vast array of the dead are alike awaiting the blast of the trumpet. Pious folks use both suppositions just as it serves their immediate purpose in a reckless and very unsatisfactory way.

In the palmy days of Christianity great and severe efforts were made to force men to confess faith in Jesus whether they had it or not : and even to force them from one variety of that faith to another. And even yet, in many parts of our earth's surface pressure of a more or less mild character is exerted to oblige men to confess belief in the creed that may be in vogue in that particular part ; and where more than one creed, or various forms of a creed, are found, both pressure and inducements are often at work to confess the one that is most fashionable. Religious belief, however, is everywhere now too weak to give us more than a faint impression of what it once had the compulsive energy to force men to do.

Jesus declares that according as men own and deny him here, so he will own and deny them before his Father. " Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you ;" " All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," are apparently maxims not binding upon their author or re-asserter. Jesus' mode of illustrating them during his earthly life was, as we shall see, a very singular one. But in his final dealings with us they will be entirely discarded. " If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ; do not even the publicans the same ?" " Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." How we are to seek perfection by imitating a Being who acts upon totally different principles to those enjoined upon ourselves is a problem that lies entirely beyond any conceptive capacities of ours. The law of retaliation is unworthy of a good man, but not it appears of a good God, who will act upon that law in a manner and to an extent that the hardest human being would be shocked at. Theologians of a certain type have set themselves with much ardour to the defence of such a godly mode of treatment, but with no success. Their contentions are simply a defence of pure tyranny. God created us for his own pleasure ; he has a right to do with us and to us whatever he chooses, they say. We entirely controvert the proposition. God has no more right to commit injustice than any other being. He has no more right even to be unkindly, unreasonable, and uncharitable than any other being has. He is as bound as ourselves by the eternal laws of justice and righteous dealing.

Jesus, like the other religious founders who use the same promise and the same threat for confessing and denying them, does not deal

with the real point which is, Why did men then, and Why do they yet deny him, or more correctly, not confess him? How came it that of those who had the advantage of seeing him personally and of listening to what he said, so very few confessed him? How came it that even his own brethren and sisters and fellow Nazarenes, who knew more about him than any other human beings, did not confess him? How was it that the doubts even of those who accepted him continually showed themselves; that even of the eleven here addressed, the very last thing we hear is the statement made by one of them, "but some doubted"?

A religious claimant would not need to indulge in threats if he would only furnish men with sufficient and satisfactory grounds for believing him. Whose loss is non-belief but the non-believer's?

We are told, though not in this Gospel, that when Jesus was born some angels made their appearance, not in Jerusalem, but to some shepherds in the fields in the neighbourhood, and made the happy announcement, "Peace on earth." It is much to be feared that there was some misunderstanding on the part of these angels, or more likely these shepherds, as the massacre of little Bethlehemites which immediately followed the proclamation shows us; or possibly the announcement—peace on earth—needs, like so much Scripture, to be taken in some inner and deeper sense than the natural one. Be that as it may, we necessarily prefer the authority of Jesus even to that of angels. Besides, facts are, unhappily, not on the side of the angels.

Jesus did not wish men to remain under any amiable illusion about him on this matter. He was not a peace-bringer and men were not to think so. What he sent amongst us, and came to send, was a sword.

All religions are apples of discord among men, and have ever been so. All religious founders are very obvious stirrers-up of strife. But the cynical candour with which Jesus owns the fact so far as his own system is concerned, takes us aback. The Prophet of Mecca is at times remarkably outspoken; in anything appertaining to what he alleges to be the criminal blindness of men to the true light he often says harsh and severe things, but we cannot call to mind

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

anything approaching to the frankness displayed by the Prophet of Nazareth in these two precious verses. To own that he is come to set father and son, mother and daughter, at variance with each other, even if we soften the meaning down to taking it in the sense of such being the result rather than the purpose of his mission, is a piece of extreme outspokenness.

The sword which Jesus here announces that he brought to our earth, and the sword of the great prophet who six centuries later founded another huge religion, have between them deluged our planet with human blood. In the prolonged struggle for the possession of Jesus' tomb, the two swords soaked the Holy Land itself with Christian and Moslem blood. In that particular contest success long alternated, sometimes Nazareth, sometimes Mecca having the advantage, the latter singularly enough having the final mastery; and Jesus, more singular still, looked down from above upon the appalling butchery with entire unconcern, or at any rate strict non-intervention.

The growth of knowledge and of humanity, and the decay of faith, have arrested the use of the Christian, the Moslem, and all other religious rapiers. Religious antagonisms still, indeed, exist and produce their baleful effects; but it is on so subdued a scale as to be now observable only on special occasions.

With the view of screening these verses from the indignation they so justly excite, Christian commentators have performed some strange exploits. The gyrations, intellectual and moral, wrought upon this passage are amongst the most curious examples of the melancholy art of sophistry. Efforts to prove that black is white, that brass is gold, are always mournful exhibitions; mournful chiefly not because of their non-success, nor even because they are immoral, but because it is so lamentable to think that men should ever bring themselves to think it a duty to try.

Surely it was the duty of Jesus not less than that of others, but even more than others, to say clearly what it was he meant. How then comes it that commentators are perpetually engaged in showing that the natural and apparent meaning of Scripture is not its intended meaning: that we are to understand so many things in some other sense? After it leaves the hands of commentators, this hideous, or as they themselves admit, this hideous-looking passage is altered beyond recognition. First of all, the intention and purpose of sending a sword, so distinctly and palpably owned

to by Jesus, are, by a familiar process of "rectification," declared to simply mean result and consequence. This important adjustment being duly seen to, the sword and disturbance are then gently transferred from Jesus and his followers to those who resist or do not accept them. It is not the disturbers, but the disturbed, who create all this unpleasantness. It is not the amiable evangelists, who accost men with, Believe, or Perish, but those so accosted, who make all the discord.

Whilst hoping that such distinguished services, such happy expositions, and such striking improvements upon his sayings may be in due course suitably rewarded by their blessed Lord, we have in the meantime no option but to prefer Jesus to his revisers and emendators. "I came," says Jesus, "to send a sword." Yes, Reader, there these verses are in all their native beauty, and there they remain; a lasting reminder of the obligations the human race is under to religious founders.

36 And a man's foes
shall be they of his own
household.

The disruption in a household caused by a new faith, or even by a new departure or attempted modification of an existing faith, we know but too well. The internal history of Christianity is full of striking illustrations of the splitting up of households which even minor differences of religion can cause. This especially ugly feature of religious discord, however, is one that from its nature does not endure like some other forms. Family harmony is restored in the next generation by the children of each household respectively being indoctrinated with the same parental belief. The family discords that by this process disappear, expand, however, by this same process of instilling antagonistic beliefs into the children of different families, into local, sectional, and eventually national and racial discords. Much as these latter are to be deplored, and unspeakably sad as their consequences are, they are yet not quite so distasteful as the family alienations that preceded them. There can be little doubt, as we shall see later on, that the attitude of his own household to himself was at the bottom of the most painful descriptions of family feuds and discords Jesus so reiterates and dwells upon.

37 He that loveth
father or mother more
than me is not worthy

The standard of personal attachment to himself here declared by Jesus to be due from his followers is a sufficiently exacting one. How far it has ever been attained, and how much less will be

of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

accepted, we have no means of knowing. We have, it is true, a quantity of pietistic literature in which the consuming love felt to Jesus by certain souls is glowingly depicted. But certain characteristics of such literature incline us to view it with much caution. This, together with the antecedent doubt how far it be really possible for a normal human being to feel to some one never seen a degree of attachment exceeding that felt for one's own child, inclines us to the view that the standard here set up by Jesus has never been attained. No doubt amongst his early followers, who had the advantage of seeing him, and especially with those who knew him intimately, a high degree of personal attachment to Jesus is quite conceivable. How far the love and devotion of any of these, as we see them set forth in these Gospels, came up to the measure held forth in this verse, every reader must judge for himself. Our own conviction is strong that Jesus has been quite as well trusted, if not as well loved, by many who never saw him, as he was by those who had that privilege.

This anticipatory reference to the cross, unless it had been preceded by some explanation, which what we meet with later on renders unlikely, would somewhat puzzle these disciples. The point of interest to us in this declaration is the question, What is involved in these days in taking up a cross and following Jesus? What is required in faith and practice of any one disposed and wishful now to do this? Alas, the question, What or which is true Christianity? remains as unsettled as ever. As a faith it is still the theological battle-ground it has been from the first. There are, it is true, now but few theological bickerings and disputings as compared with times past. But this is not because any of the moot points have been settled, but because there is a general agreement as to the vanity of any further attempts to settle them. There is now a general feeling amongst all kinds of Christian "churches" that it is best to let each variety go in peace and work out whatever destiny may await it. Except, of course, in the case of the greatest of them all, which even in its lessened circumstances, still continues to majestically ignore all the others either as rivals or co-workers.

What, beyond the recognized moral and humane duties, following Jesus demands of men in the matter of practical life is equally a

38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

matter of uncertainty. The ordinary lives of the various kinds of Christians around us do not impress us with the idea that the elementary requirement we have just named is, as a matter of fact, much supplemented in any ascertainable way. If the usual Christian practice may be taken as a criterion, taking up a cross and following Jesus does not seem a very arduous or exacting process.

The first part of this antithesis is not very clear; but it is no doubt intended to show what a folly the best use of life is apart from the preparation for heaven. As regards the second part there is no difficulty. Religious "martyrdom" and sacrifice either for Jesus' or for any of the other sakes it has so often been endured is a highly remunerative investment, provided it be realized. Even as a speculation it has often been thought worth venturing. The difficulty with us moderns is to perceive where in a proceeding so thoroughly mercenary the sacrifice and heroism come in.

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

40 ¶ He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

The principle of delegation is here set forth and carried to a great extreme; for those who receive these disciples are declared to receive God himself. It is vain to seek to ascribe any definite meaning to such a phrase, for the reason that almost any meaning may be given to it. And with regard to the latter clause, any one who will consult the controversies between Trinitarian and Unitarian theologians will find the phrase "him that sent me" variously explained, to his astonishment, if not to his satisfaction.

As there are no longer any prophets, the first portion of this fantastic verse has now no practical interest. But happily there are still many righteous men; far more, we believe, than at any preceding period of human history. It seems, therefore, as though we ought to be able to gather some information from the declaration that "he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."

But we have been obliged to abandon the attempt; and on referring to others who have made any effort to interpret the phrase we find they have had no better success; any meanings they ascribe to the

passage being obviously arrived at by the process of insertion, not extraction.

Though we decidedly prefer a good work done for its own sake rather than done in the name of Jesus or in the name of a disciple, or for any ulterior object whatever, we are not disposed to quarrel with kindly, humane actions in whatever name or from whatever object they are done. But the best human beings neither expect nor desire any recompense for such acts; the pleasing internal satisfaction, and the good results flowing from such deeds are to them quite sufficient. Indeed the idea of reward or repayment for such kindlinesses is a degradation of them.

MATTHEW XI.

WE infer from this verse that Jesus and his disciples now separated; the latter proceeding on their expedition, and Jesus himself setting out "thence" to visit "their cities." The proceedings of both are, however, surrounded with much obscurity; and it is seldom we can feel sure where anything recorded took place.

CHAPTER XI.
2 John sendeth his disciples to Christ. 7 Christ's testimony concerning John. 18 The opinion of the people, both concerning John and Christ. 20 Christ upbraideth the unthankfulness and unrepentance of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum: 25 and praising his Father's wisdom in revealing the gospel to the simple, 28 he calleth to him all such as feel the burden of their sins.

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

in prison and ye visited me not." The visitation of prisoners received the same kind of negative illustration by Jesus that he gave to so many of his other injunctions and maxims.

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples.

We think even Christians will join us in regretting that we do not read of Jesus or even "two of his

disciples" visiting John. The plea of personal danger to one whose mere word would have smitten down every obstacle is too futile for notice. And we own that to our mind and feelings it would have been far more agreeable to read of the opening of John's prison than of the stilling a tempest on the lake of Capernaum. It is also disappointing to find that a message came at last not from Jesus to John, but from John to Jesus.

And a melancholy message it was. Melancholy but significant.

3 And said unto him,
Art thou he that should
come, or do we look for
another?

"Art thou he"? John's faith in the prison was not what it had been in the wilderness, or on the banks of the Jordan. But such feeble faith, such an unexpected breakdown as this

amazes us. Many a humble follower of Jesus who had never beheld him has since borne far harder and longer trials than John had done with unshaken faith. The martyrologies not only of the Christian but of other faiths, supply us with some very different stories to this of John.

And how shall we account, Reader, for the scepticism here so candidly avowed by John? Only some months ago had he not baptized Jesus in Jordan and declared himself not worthy to unloose Jesus' shoe? Had he not seen the Dove alight upon Jesus, and heard Jehovah himself declare Jesus to be his beloved Son? And yet after the lapse of so short an interval he sends two of his own disciples to Jesus to put the dreadful question "Art thou he?"!

Nothing is more surprising, than to find how extremely sceptical the "men of God" have ever been, not only in the Christian but in the Jewish and in every other religious system. We have said nothing more surprising; we think we ought to have said nothing more natural. For the extension of any faith at all by a normal human mind to the doings and proceedings proffered to us as those of Heaven by the various religious systems of our race is the thing to be really astonished at.

We shall find later on that this backsliding of the Baptist was no exceptional case. The twelve whom Jesus had just sent out exhibit the same collapse of faith. When Jesus was arrested, eleven of them, including our author and, alas! the Rock upon which the Church is founded, "fled." Men who could heal all sickness and all disease and who could raise the dead fled at the appearance of danger!

It is usual for theologians and commentators in dealing with these unpleasant things to try to soften matters by a homily upon the weakness and frailty of human nature. We entirely decline to acknowledge such conduct as this of the Baptist and that of the disciples we have named as typical of human nature generally. Men who have never seen what John is stated to have seen, have remained staunch under trials far greater than he endured. And the history of our race teems with cases showing that when a companion is arrested men do not flee but stand by his side.

What Jesus thought of John's message is not stated, nor does his answer disclose. By hypothesis, he, of course, already knew John's state of mind; but then the same consideration applies in other cases where we, nevertheless, find things given as producing in Jesus surprise, pleasure, and anger just as they would in anyone else. However this may be, Jesus does not remind John of what occurred at the baptism, but refers him to his—Jesus'—miracles, an account of which he bids the two disciples take back to their imprisoned master. From this it would almost seem that John and John's disciples had not previously seen or heard of Jesus' miracles.

Whatever we may think of Jesus' answer to John's message in other respects, it does not refer to the most urgent feature of the case. John was just about to be decapitated; and if in pursuance of some dismal purpose, a helping hand had not to be held out to him, some active measure of sympathy and consolation might have been vouchsafed him. The angel who announced his birth, or one of the angels who so often a little later rendered gaols and gaolers of none effect, might have been sent to solace John's last moments. Such considerations are, however, merely human and humane ones; and as such differ widely, as we know, from those presumably profound, but certainly profoundly dreary, ways so often laid before us as Divine.

What effect Jesus' reply had upon these disciples, and upon their master when it reached him, we are not told. Whether John was reassured, whether he died in faith or in doubt, we have no means of knowing.

This is certainly a very modest way of asserting one's claims.

6 And blessed is *he*, But this meek and amiable declaration has, as

4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

whosoever shall not be offended in me.

on the part of Jesus that are neither meek nor amiable.

After the departure of John's disciples, who did not apparently stay to hear a description of their master, Jesus proceeded to speak to the multitudes concerning John. It is hardly necessary to dwell upon these verses. After using some commonplace imagery whose bearing is not very clear, Jesus declares John to be more than a prophet, to be a special messenger spoken of by the prophets; a fact which our author apprised us of at the outset of his narrative.

It is to be presumed that in saying, "among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John," Jesus excepts himself; that he speaks of those born of women by the customary process of man's co-operation. We do not know if it be theologically per-

missible to dissent from Jesus on a minor point. If it be so, we shall certainly take the liberty on this matter. That there has, or to that time never had been, a greater human being than John the Baptist, is a view to which we can give no sort of concurrence. What there was really great in John we are not able to discern. His asceticism and

—judging from his dress, his diet, and his long residence in the deserts — his fanaticism were great; but even in that sorry competition he has been outstripped by many an Oriental fakir. The utterances of John in our possession are most commonplace. Some of them, indeed, are honoured by being placed even in that humble classification, trivialities being their just designation. Even if we take this statement of Jesus regarding John in a purely religious sense, the estimate is one that surprises us.

But Jesus proceeds to qualify his complimentary reference to John by an assertion regarding him of the most strange and puzzling kind. Was John then not in the kingdom of heaven; not a member of that misty organization? If John was not in the kingdom of heaven at the time Jesus spoke this, who were the people who then formed it? Besides, was not John the first to

declare—even before Jesus himself did so—that this same kingdom of heaven was at hand? We think most readers will find something very ungenerous in this allusion to John. Perhaps the effect of John's "Art thou he?" had not quite passed away.

"From the days of John the Baptist until now" is, indeed, a singular expression. It was so short a time since John first proclaimed the kingdom of heaven as being "at hand" until the "now" here mentioned by Jesus, that that kingdom could hardly have suffered very severely in so limited a period. It is none the less surprising, however, to learn of the sad fate which had befallen the heavenly kingdom hitherto. The kingdoms of the earth have often been taken and retaken by violence, but it has been because the kings thereof could not help it. That the kingdom of heaven should undergo so unaccountable a catastrophe, with its king able to avert it, is not a little puzzling. It is satisfactory to find—as we shall a little further on—that steps were taken by Jesus to render so lamentable an occurrence impossible in future. Jesus soon after this based his Church upon that eminent rock, Simon Peter, with the result that hell itself is no longer able to prevail against it, much less mere men take it by force.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

These small verses—small in other senses than bulk—do not call for many remarks. We read in the fourth Gospel that when John was asked by the Jews, "Art thou Elias?" he answered, "I am not." Jesus, however, tells us "this is Elias which was for to come." We need hardly remark, Reader, that even flat contradictions offer little difficulty to a certain class of commentators. Were the statement that two and two make five met with in these Gospels, it would afford no trouble to such pious souls. They would tell us that the latter numeral must not be taken in its usual sense, but in some other; and that rightly looked at, the statement had a deep significance. It is, of course, possible that by transmigration of soul John the Baptist was Elias, but not himself aware of it. The best feature of this statement of Jesus is that the prefix, "If ye will receive it," seems to leave belief in the identity of John and Elias optional. The last of these verses is one of Jesus' favourite phrases, which we shall often meet with hereafter.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Having finished his references to the Baptist, Jesus proceeded to

16 ¶ But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

upbraid the generation he had for some inscrutable reason decided humanly to join. The "faithless and perverse" generation he selected to come amongst is a subject of frequent reference by Jesus, and we leave over to other occasions our reflections upon this curious matter. Jesus here declares his generation to have been amenable and responsive to no kind

of appeal. Mirth and sorrow, asceticism and sociability, were, Jesus declares, alike addressed in vain to his contemporaries. We shall also find that miracles were wasted upon them, and that even earthquakes and a darkened Sun failed to stir or move them.

We read elsewhere in this Gospel that "all hold John as a prophet." Here Jesus tells us that "they

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

say" John is possessed with a devil. It is, indeed, evident enough that John no more inspired unanimity than any other religionist

ever did. All religionists are stormy petrels, as Jesus himself has so candidly and forcibly set before us. Unlike the great poets, great artists, and great discoverers, who unite mankind in love and admiration and in gratefulness, the setting at variance of households, cities, and nations, is the one invariable fruit of all religious claimants. And we may add that there can be little doubt that great thinkers on moral, social, and other subjects would weld us together in much greater unanimity were it not that the religious element, with its disruptive and alienating consequences, steps in.

Jesus tells us that in antipodal contrast to John, he himself came

19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

"eating and drinking;" by which is obviously meant a complying with the usual customs on such matters of those around him. It is true, no doubt, that Jesus underwent one immense fast; but neither here, nor in his reply to John's disciples who waited upon him on this

very subject, nor in any other of his references to the subject of fasting, does he mention the fact; from which we infer that he did not wish his own fast to be made or held up as a thing to be in any measure imitated.

The prevalent notion of those times being that sanctity and asceticism were inseparable, Jesus' non-compliance with that notion

caused him to be aspersed, and to be described, amongst other things, as a "winebibber." It is not wise to build too much upon a casual reference of this kind; but a number of things combine to show us that in these matters Jesus was of a genial and social disposition; and very pleasant it is to find it so.

"But wisdom is justified of her children." We like this saying greatly. It is a true and a useful one. It is a well-merited rebuke of that mischievous search after uniformity, that pernicious attempt to squeeze men into one mould, that has been so inexpressibly hurtful to mankind. This very fine saying deserves to be constantly borne in mind by thinkers, workers, and reformers of all kinds, and even by scientists also. Wisdom, knowledge, and goodness have come, do come, and will come from many sources and in many ways; and they have no greater enemies than those who pretend that their own particular avenue is the sole one.

We are not able to rank John very high amongst the children of real wisdom. All men who sincerely strive to better the world, as we may well believe John did, may in one sense be termed children of wisdom; but wise intentions must be associated with wise methods to do anything for practical wisdom. Any good derivable from asceticism had been known to the world long before John came to it. And what an amazing condescension is here displayed by Jesus; the all-wise Creator humbly classing himself amongst the "children of wisdom"!

We have lingered upon this broadminded saying of Jesus, for it has been a pleasure to do so. Alas! it is here, as in other cases, quickly followed by something very different.

We now come to a curious exemplification of some of the doctrines propounded in the sermon on the mount. Jesus

20 ¶ Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

proceeds to denounce vengeance against the three "cities," as they are here termed, where "most" of his mighty works were done: in reality, three small country places whose very

names would have been lost if it had not been for the mention here made of them.

It appears that the citizens of these three places were people upon whom mighty works had no effect. We do not read that they were bad, depraved, or in any way exceptionally wicked people. They were far worse than that; they were deaf to a new evangel; declined to accept a new faith; and for this crime Jesus avows that

he has in store for them a fate to which the fate of Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom—real or supposed wicked places—is not to be compared.

Forgiveness, the returning of good for evil, love of enemies, and doing good to them that hate us, are modes of conduct we are to practise. They are altitudes of love and lovingkindness we are to aim at. But in so doing we have not, unhappily, the advantage and encouragement of heavenly example. Instead of that, we have displayed to us vindictiveness and revenge of the worst and extremest kind.

Religious toleration in a religious founder would, we suppose, be a sort of contradiction in terms. But there are things—the laws of Nature and laws of the human mind—to which even such personages as religious founders must accommodate themselves, or, like humbler folks, they will assuredly stultify themselves. A Divine Being capable of one enormity is obviously capable of any; and consequently a Being, whatever be his power, at whose hands security becomes a derision. In such hands people are as safe one way as another, for the reason that they are safe no way. Hence it is that hells of all kinds stultify themselves; they imply and necessitate a monster as their creator and maintainer.

Besides, Jesus knew beforehand that the mighty works he wrought in these three places would be useless. On the other hand, he assures us that had he performed them in Tyre and Sidon they would have been most effective and most fruitful. Now from his old home in Nazareth, Tyre and Sidon, on the one hand, and Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, on the other, were almost equidistant. Jesus had simply to walk due north to the former places, instead of north-east to the latter. To the south he went much greater distances—altogether apart from the visit to Egypt. Yet he here tells us that he bestowed his mighty works upon places where they proved a failure, but did not even once visit two real cities where those works would have yielded great results. Anyone who can reflect upon such ideas without finding all the best fibres of his nature, both of mind and heart, grated upon is not constituted as we are. That Jesus should bestow his works where they met with non-success, and neglect ground where a harvest would have followed, is quite intelligible from a purely natural standpoint. It is what good men have often unwittingly done. But that he should do this, foreknowing the result in each case, is repulsive and unendurable.

The people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and the people of Tyre and Sidon, have equal reason to regret that inexplicable choice. It was an arrangement by which they were all lost; the former through the visit of Jesus, the latter from the want of it.

And to us, in these after times, it was a course greatly to be regretted. In Tyre and Sidon, Moses and the prophets, and Jewish things generally, would have possessed but a very secondary interest; and there is no doubt that in questions and conversations in those cities with Jesus, we should have had illumination upon very different things to those of unwashed hands and like matters dealt with in conferences with Pharisees. And how much better to us, in these far-off days, would have been the moral effect and reassuring influence of success in such cities, than foreseen failure in these obscure villages. Some think ancient Tyre and Sidon are here referred to by Jesus; a supposition which, if true, would not in the smallest degree alter the tenour of our remarks.

And what, Reader, was the crime for which these villagers are

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

here denounced? It was for the crime of adhering to the faith of their fathers; a course generally considered a grand virtue, and which religionists of every system extol in preposterous terms when it suits their purpose to do so. It was a crime of which not only Jesus' own countrymen generally, but even his own relatives were also guilty.

But it is said these people had witnessed mighty works which were proof positive. Perhaps they had. But even granting the objective reality of the works wrought at these places, would such things be proof positive of the Messiahship of Jesus? Jesus himself tells us that "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders." The two-fold source and origin of miracles peer out through all these Gospels. How were these people to discriminate? Were the mighty works Jesus wrought amongst the Gergesenes of such an illuminating kind as to involve them also in the sad fate of their neighbours? We shall find at the end of this Gospel that far greater wonders than any recorded as happening at Chorazin, Bethsaida, or Capernaum, took place at Jerusalem without in the smallest degree affecting the people there. It is easy for us in

these days who, whatever we may think of true prophets, do not believe in the power of false ones to do the very smallest real wonder, to say that the peoples of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum ought to have known such mighty works could only be from one source. Such was not their belief, nor was it the view laid down by Jesus himself. Where is the evidential value of miracles when admitted to be derivable from two opposite sources? "Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?"

Unhappy Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum! It was a sad day for you when Jesus decided to pay you a visit. Perhaps your ordinary, placid, commonplace existence was not an ideal one; but it would have been well for you had it never been interrupted. A visit from the Prophet of Nazareth was indeed a perilous blessing. His first human appearance in Bethlehem made a terrible red-letter day in that place. The disastrous result of his visits to Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, we here see declared. His appearance amongst the Gergesenes cannot be regarded as a very happy one. His own town Nazareth, where Jesus spent the great bulk of his life, he himself contrasts unfavourably even with the other places he went to: for he tells us, referring to the very point, that "a prophet is not without honour save in his own country and in his own house." Perhaps the fact that "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" is the reason why he does not name Nazareth amongst the other places here denounced. And yet, inasmuch as the people of that place knew him far better than any others; as not only those of his own house, but many around, must have known Jesus intimately for years, it seems to us that responsibility for unbelief in him must have been far heavier with the Nazarenes than with those who knew him only by relatively brief visits. Finally, when he went up to Jerusalem, he did so only to denounce against that place a series of woes and calamities.

If such were the result of Jesus' personal presence amongst men, what of his evangel amongst our race ever since? Its primary effects when proclaimed by his followers have been vividly and grimly described, as we have just seen, by Jesus himself. Its blood-stained annals during the following sixteen centuries we all know only too well. And though in these later ages, owing to its own disruption, to the general decay of faith, and to the havoc made

by modern discovery, it comports itself very demurely in all outward respects, what of its main end and purpose? "Few there be that find it." Whether Christians adopt the election or free-grace theory of their system the net result is not altered. If the Prophet of Nazareth be the saviour of mankind we cannot help the exclamation, Poor mankind !

We do not know whether the day of judgment has already taken effect upon these villagers or it is still to come. Nor have we any means of estimating the degree of punishment they are now suffering, or have to suffer. It is greater than the penalty now being endured by or awaiting the peoples of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom ; but as we are in ignorance what this latter is, we have no means of conjecturing the severity of the fate of these villagers.

Most men, we think, will feel that the centurion's servant, the ruler's daughter, the bed-ridden palsied man, the two blind men, the two who had the legions, and the all and sundry, far and wide, whom Jesus had cured of every sickness and every disease, were indeed deserving of punishment if they were not grateful and not duly impressed with what they had experienced. And it must be owned that the entire absence of this mass of cured humanity from any mention in the latter part of this Gospel history, and the entire untraceableness of any of them in early Christian history, give us a very bad impression of their behaviour after thus being miraculously worked upon. If this view of their conduct be correct, we sincerely hope, not that they have been sent down to hell, for in that case they had been better left uncured, but that they have been appropriately punished for such insensibility and indifference to what had been done for them.

And even the spectators of such events, presuming them to have been satisfied of their reality, will seem to most men censurable for their irresponsiveness, if we do not remember that unfortunate theory then prevalent of the double origin of miracle power, a theory expressly allowed and admitted by Jesus himself, and which goes a long way to greatly qualifying, if it does not entirely absolve, the blame otherwise attaching to these spectators. The absence of this confusing belief in the people of Tyre and Sidon is the probable reason why these same works wrought there would have produced not only sackcloth and ashes, but also, it is to be presumed, those active results justly due from the beholding of such works when believed to issue from a celestial source only.

Though it seems natural to us to feel surprise and regret that the works fruitlessly wrought in Capernaum were not vouchsafed in Sodom, where it seems they would have been so happily fruitful, it is, as we know, vain to apply to heaven's doings any of the canons of the human mind or the feelings of the human breast. The conscious withholding of fertile and conscious bestowing of sterile wonders are but one of those celestial methods of going about things on our planet which, though according to believers unsearchably profound, have unhappily such an unpleasantly close resemblance to quite another quality.

23 And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

"Leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum," we read a little while back. For the former step we can see certain natural reasons; for the latter we must be content to be without. Our author, in his usual manner, tells us it was done to fulfil prophecy. Fulfilling prophecy is, however, but a nominal and proximate cause of a thing, the reason why prophecy was so written and events so pre-arranged being the real point: for, as we shall see, some very unpleasant, indeed extremely ugly, things were written by the prophets. The particular prophecy regarding the removal of Jesus from Nazareth to Capernaum quoted by our author, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up," is indeed a melancholy one read side by side with what Jesus himself here says. These people might be in the region and shadow of death up to that time; where they are now we know but too well. We are often assured that in religious matters men will be judged by their opportunities, which seems a very just proposition. But when, as we see from the cases of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, increase of religious light means increase of religious peril, we feel somewhat saddened. And we cannot help reflecting, as we think of the microscopic success of Christian missions to the heathen, and the multitude of deaf ears turned thereto, that the final effect of those pious endeavours must be to make the eternal fate of the heathen generally much less "tolerable" than it would otherwise have been. When exaltation to heaven results in being brought down to hell, it seems eminently desirable to quietly remain on *terra firma*.

It would seem from this that non-acceptance of his Gospel is regarded by Jesus as a worse crime even than the sins of Sodom; and he assures us that he intends to make it less tolerable for those who do not embrace his evangel—or, at any rate, for those who at first hand refused it—than for Sodomites. It is not necessary to dwell upon such a declaration which reduces the day of judgment to a day of petty revenge entirely unworthy of human thought. Such declarations and the similar declarations of other religious founders, however, serve the very useful purpose of revealing to us the true nature of the “philanthropy” and pity for our race they all profess to be their animating purpose. At times these founders are so amiable and so tender, so saintly and so lamb-like; they declare they yearn towards us with such bowels and mercies that they are quite captivating. The penalty, however, for not receiving their gracious messages rouses our suspicions. To offer men a great boon is indeed kind; but eternal damnation for not accepting it is a corollary whose harmony and justice are not discernible. The slender belief in the intrinsic attraction of their offers, and the felt necessity for re-inforcement by terrorism thus displayed are very humbling. The same result is common to every religious system alike. If there be one among them that is true, it has met but a like fate with all the false ones; it has been accepted by and has saved a mere fragment of our race.

Of one thing we may rest assured. Whether we hold the theory of the determinism of human actions or not, we may depend upon it the peoples of Nazareth, of Capernaum, of Chorazin, of Bethsaida, of Gergese, and finally of Jerusalem, had some adequate and sufficient cause which rendered them irresponsive to the new faith. Christians may, if they choose, follow the example of the faithful of other creeds and ascribe men’s non-acceptance to wilful blindness or moral delinquency. It is not worth while attempting to deal with the satisfaction professed to be derived from such allegations.

In studying these Gospels we become used to abruptness; still the transition from the last passage to this gives us a sort of jolt. In passing from the declared intention of Jesus to make it worse for the people of Capernaum, amongst whom he was then living, than for those of Sodom,

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

25 ¶ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and

hast revealed them unto babes.

26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight,

to the return of thanks to his Father for having "hid these things" from the wise and revealed them to babes, we feel some adjustment of our thoughts required in order to get into more harmony with what seems quite a different spirit and an entirely different subject. It is conceivable, no doubt, that this present verse and the last may have had some connexion, but it is not now perceptible.

"At that time" is one of several phrases used by our author, with the ostensible intention of enlightening us as to the time, place, and connexion of his events, but which do not serve the purpose. "That time" may here mean the occasion last dealt with or some entirely different one; the latter, from the phrase beginning a new paragraph and from other circumstances, seeming the more probable. Such a style of narrative as our author's gives us no certainty that two things found together were in any way connected or even followed in the order we find them. When we refer to the other Gospels and compare them with this and with each other we find events and things transposed and intermixed in a very strange fashion.

What were the hidden things here alluded to; who were the wise and prudent, and who the babes we will not endeavour even to surmise. The passage is noticeable for that sneering at and slighting of human wisdom and human prudence characteristic more or less of every religious system. Natural wisdom and natural prudence are not only disparaged, they are evidently cordially disliked by all supernaturalists. It is a true instinct on their part. For when tested by those natural qualities, celestial milksops are found to be singularly thin fare.

Yet it is surely questionable whether such disparagements of human wisdom are politic; whether they show very striking wisdom of another and better kind or not. Whatever be the value and real validity of human wisdom, it is, at any rate, a laudable and honourable effort to discover truth and to practise the best course discernible by man. And when it falls in with their purpose, these same religious founders not only appeal to it but extol it; and, unfortunately, often praise specimens of it then thought to be good which better knowledge has led men to discard.

Never, we think, were stranger thanks returned to heaven than these. It is disheartening to see the pursuit of wisdom and prudence thus treated. Still we must not let ourselves be too much

discouraged. We are happily able to call to mind other portions of Scripture that we may justly avail ourselves of for the purpose of consolation and of assuaging any distrust this passage may cause. For example, did not Jehovah once invite men to reason with him ; and does not this very Gospel begin by apprising us of the great honour shown to some wise men from the East ?

Then, too, do not many of the "babes" of our own time combine with their heavenly endowments much, and apparently often very successful, study and pursuit of natural wisdom and prudence ?

We approach this verse with a good deal of misgiving. Even experienced theologians seem afraid of it. It has a very important look with it ; for it deals at once with an exceedingly abstruse and with an extremely grave practical subject. But we own at once that we are baffled in every effort to gather from it the information it seems to contain.

27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father ; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

No light is obtainable by knowing to whom or under what circumstances the statement was made. It can hardly be regarded as addressed, like the preceding verses, to the First person of the Trinity ; for it has no appropriateness so considered. We have, therefore, to look at the statement by its own internal light alone.

The declaration that "all things are delivered unto me" does not, we take it, set forth a new condition of things, but is simply a statement of fact that has always been the case ; though we feel some diffidence as to the soundness of our theology upon the point. The transference of all things from the First to the Second person of the Trinity, if we conceive it as having ever actually occurred, does not impress us as a change of any real or, at any rate, any ascertainable kind.

Leaving this we proceed to the two propositions contained in the remainder of this verse. The first is that no man knoweth the Son except the Father ; the second that no man knoweth the Father except the Son. The knowledge is thus mutual and it is exclusive ; shared by none others inherently ; though as regards the latter and second knowledge (which is apparently the greater of the two kinds) it may be imparted by Jesus to those of us to whom he may choose to grant the favour.

The importance of this verse consists for us in the fact that whilst it deals with the relation of Jesus to his Father and *vice*

versa, it also makes an affirmation regarding our relation to both. It is this latter aspect of the subject that arrests our attention. The relationship of the First and Second persons of the Trinity lies outside the domain of useful consideration. But we seem bound to try to comprehend a statement laying down human relationship to such Beings or Being.

Theologians tell us that by the word "know," as here used in the phrase "no man knoweth," we are to understand complete as opposed to partial knowledge. We may well admit that no one completely knows the Father except the Son; and it is impossible to suppose that even Jesus ever transfers such complete knowledge to any of us; that he causes any of us to know the Father in that sense of the word. Such transmitted knowledge must clearly be partial owing to the limitation of the human faculties to which Jesus imparts it.

But is nothing whatever known of God by man except through the medium of Jesus? "Ye believe in God, believe also in me," seems a singular appeal to men. What then, too, becomes of those presumptuous deistical claims to have discovered God's being and his attributes altogether apart from Jesus and his revelation? And how came the Jews to have the intimate acquaintance with God we know they possessed ere Jesus came on earth? Possibly the latter came through Jesus in his pre-mundane existence; but we cannot imagine his illumining those impious men who have professed to demonstrate the existence and attributes of his Father whilst denying his own claim to deity. Natural theology seems a very doubtful science.

It may be remarked, too, that the copious and detailed knowledge of the character of God that we possess comes to us much more from the Jewish writings than from Jesus' own information on the subject imparted to us in these Gospels, which is in truth most meagre; whilst so far as we know there has been no further addition to our knowledge of God since.

Though we feel to be getting into theological labyrinths little to our liking and which we are ill-fitted to tread, it seems a duty to ask ourselves what it is lawful and proper for us to infer from the last clause of this verse. What is the knowledge of his Father imparted by Jesus to certain human beings? And is there any discoverable reason for which, or knowable method by which, these happy members of our race are singled out or render themselves

worthy to be thus honoured? It is greatly to be feared that no certain answer can be given to either question. It is obvious from the statement itself that the knowledge of God imparted to certain men by Jesus, cannot by them be communicated to other men. It is not one of those happy forms of knowledge that can be shared with and dispensed to others; it can only come to each individual direct from Jesus. With regard to the delicate question how or why some of our species are thus favoured, it is obviously but another form of the old and chronic difficulty of free grace or predestination, which has had such an amount of human thought bestowed upon it in vain, and which still constitutes a well-known rift in Christian doctrine.

But the most singular portion of this verse is the statement "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father." It begins to be manifest that the word know is used by Jesus in some mystic sense in this clause if not in the others. For at the time he spoke this, a great many men, both believers and unbelievers, knew Jesus very well in the ordinary sense of knowing a person. It is not quite clear if this occult knowledge of the Son is also imparted to any of us: presumably it accompanies the knowledge of the Father revealed by Jesus to certain individuals.

We leave this verse with a good deal of dissatisfaction. It seems a statement of fact from which we ought to be able to gather some information, and we feel to be leaving it without having done so. A kind of spiritual agnosticism is the only impression we feel to be carrying away with us from it.

The chapter concludes with what appears to be an outburst

28 ¶ Come unto me,
all ye that labour and
are heavy laden, and I
will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke up-
on you, and learn of me;
for I am meek and low-
ly in heart: and yeshall
find rest unto your
souls.

30 For my yoke is
easy, and my burden is
light.

of amiable sentiment of the pleading, beseeching kind. We take it to be an exclamation of kindly feeling uttered in a moment of generous impulse. No humane man can ever be insensible to expressions of kindness, good will, and good nature wheresoever he may meet with them.

It is, Reader, with the deepest and the keenest regret that we find the only response to this amiable appeal we are able to make is so partial and so qualified. At times, Jesus of Nazareth was, it is true, meek and lowly. But at other times, when he was neither meek nor lowly, he said things that froze our heart strings as we read them, and which have rendered us abso-

lutely incapable of yielding up our hearts and feelings to the tenderness here offered for our acceptance. The capacity—we had almost said the enviable capacity, but we could not honestly retain the word—apparently possessed in common by most believers of all creeds, of dwelling upon the more agreeable features of their creed and ignoring the horrible ones, is a power we are not able to exert even temporarily. The ideal Jesus set forth, inculcated, and generally current amongst Christians is a conception that the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed even in these *ex parte* Gospels renders it impossible for us to hold in our mind even momentarily or more than momentarily. The real figure of Jesus even as drawn in these friendly Gospels dispels the ideal Jesus whenever we attempt to contemplate the latter. For ourselves we might as well try to enter into and lay hold of the notions of the Prophet of Mecca held by the faithful of Islam as to embrace the current Christian conception of the Prophet of Nazareth.

A most unpleasant duty, therefore, here falls to our lot, Reader. Whilst commenting upon an amiable passage fidelity to what feels to us to be truth compels us to speak out in a way we would fain not have done. But try as we like, whilst thinking of this passage, the—well for the present we will simply say, the—not-amiable things said by Jesus in other places are still ringing in our ears; and we proceed to carry out the prime object of this work and write down our plain thoughts upon this paragraph.

Like many other portions of our author's narrative, the second half of this chapter has the obvious appearance of consisting of a number of unconnected excerpts thrown together. The disjointed look of the latter part of this chapter and its abrupt changes of subject lead us to the conclusion that the juxtaposition of things here found is our author's only. Be this as it may, these items are all, according to Christian commentators, precious gems, though admittedly of widely different hues and appearance.

We greatly wonder if any of the people of Capernaum heard the vindictive threats uttered against them by Jesus, and afterwards the amiabilities we are now perusing, and which, in this narrative at any rate, so soon followed. If they did, we can hardly be surprised if they made some remarks not altogether free from sarcasm. Some of them who may possibly have heard a certain remark of Jesus about his rivals touching the outer clothing of one animal and the inner propensities of another may conceivably have

wondered, remembering the "rest" Jesus had just declared he had in store for them, in what way the true differed from the other Christs. Consignment to hell even by the meek and lowly Jesus could hardly be considered any perceptible mitigation of so sad a fate. With most men, any professions of lowliness and saintliness upon the part of those concerned in such an act would, we are certain, be regarded, and very justly regarded, as an aggravation. If the eventuality for which so many of our fellow men are preparing themselves were to be realized and our race be adjudicated upon by Allah and his famous prophet, we are sure that Christians when receiving sentence for deportation to eternal misery will find sentimentalism of any kind on the part of those concerned therein no light additional infliction.

If, too, these supposed auditors heard the intermediate thanks returned by Jesus to his Father for his having "hid these things" from the "wise and prudent," and his declaration that "no man knoweth the Son but the Father," they must have felt bewildered. Even at this early stage listeners must have been sadly perplexed to make out what the new evangel meant; a perplexity that the very variegated Christendom of our time shows us still to continue,

The offer to the weary and heavy laden of rest is very pleasant; but why non-acceptance of the genial gift should involve so savage a punishment is not visible. It was very kind of all the many prophets who in various ages have come to teach us heavenly things; but the woes and penalties for not obeying and not learning of them are out of all proportion to the value of what they had to tell us. This plaintive invocation to men to come to a rest-giver is side by side with a denunciation of fearful vengeance upon clusters of mankind who had heard, but not responded to, the new evangel. The serpent and the dove are indeed here in contact. Such is Christianity.

For us, too, in these latter days there remains in store, we understand, a like fate for not accepting Jesus at second-hand, as for those who rejected him at first-hand. The "rest" provided for the people of Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and Capernaum awaits us also; in some form awaits all but a slender minority of our species. It is true we have not seen the mighty works those unfortunate peoples saw; indeed we have seen no mighty works of any kind, the signs declared to follow them that believe not operating with contemporary Christians. But do we not read of these works, which reading

is ample to convict us if not duly impressed? It hardly looks quite reasonable to expect us to be suitably influenced by reading of works that failed with those who saw them; but then it is not claimed that Christianity and rationality are synonymous.

Yes, Reader, this is the meek and lowly Jesus. But it is the same Jesus who is going to eternally torture all who do not accept his gospel. The same Jesus who also tells us he came to send a sword on the earth. Meekness and lowliness are all very well in their way; but when combined with swords and with furnaces that never cool, they do not make an inviting mixture.

MATTHEW XII.

ACCORDING to Jewish Geology our earth—indeed “heaven and earth and all that in them is”—was created

CHAPTER XII.

1 *Christ reproveth the blindness of the Pharisees concerning the breach of the sabbath, 3 by scriptures, 9 by reason, 13 and by a miracle. 22 He healeth the man possessed that was blind and dumb, 31 Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven. 36 Account shall be made of idle words. 38 He rebuketh the unfaithful, who seek after a sign: 49 and sheweth who is his brother, sister, and mother.*

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

in six days. After the arduous work was accomplished Jehovah “rested” on the following, the seventh day. This latter day he blessed and hallowed, and established the Jewish Sabbath in commemoration of it. It must be admitted that it was a great week’s work. The reason for the compression of creation into so short a time we do not know. Though we cannot be positive on the subject, it would seem that Jehovah never before or since that week exerted his creative power.

Seeing that after his six days’ toil God rested on the seventh and wished that day to be hallowed and observed, it seems singular that he did not mark the seventh day by something peculiar and distinctive. There is, however, nothing of the kind. With Nature all days are alike. Cattle graze and give their milk; the birds of heaven sing and build their

nests; births and deaths, indeed all things whatsoever, go on upon the seventh as upon the other six days. One would have thought there would have been a distinguishing chalk-mark of some kind, but there is not.

Hence it was that the great bulk of mankind, not having heard

of the Jewish writings, remained in entire ignorance of the Sabbath. God set apart, blessed, and hallowed the seventh day; but only informed a small number of people of the fact. It is painful to think of the general disregard of the day which he thus patiently beheld. But we do not see how any blame can be attached to men under the circumstances.

It appears, however, from what has taken place during the last century that there had previously been a serious misunderstanding upon this grave subject. For when geologists discovered that our little orb is an extremely venerable body; that even its crust has taken not days but prodigious ages in forming, the theologians simultaneously, or some short time after, made the same discovery in Scripture. It was found on more careful study that the phrase "six days" had an inner and deeper meaning; and that this meaning was in happy harmony with geological discovery. For it seems that those Eocene, Miocene, Pleiocene, and other immeasurable eras in our earth's history were allegorically, or as we consider humorously, termed days by the sacred penman who wrote the Pentateuch.

The objection that the Jews had always understood those days in their literal sense is entirely unworthy of notice; for as we have seen as regards prophecy and other things, that people never really understood their own writings.

It must be owned that the portentous expansion of the six days we have named has given a very cracked and crumpled look to the seventh; to the Sabbath and the assigned grounds of its institution. It is the bane of such adjustments as this to necessitate an unpleasant train of subsidiary alterations and patchings.

The strangest thing of all, however, is that the Jews and Christians are now at sixes and sevens in a practical and literal sense upon this subject; and that their respective Sabbaths are now held on entirely different days. It follows that one or the other must be commemorating not the day that God blessed, and hallowed and rested, but one of the days on which he worked.

But though, as we have remarked, God did not apprise men generally of his having instituted the Sabbath, he enforced it amongst the Jews with terrible rigour. "Whosoever doeth any work on the Sabbath day he shall surely be put to death": "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." When we thus call to mind

that death was the heaven-declared penalty for Sabbath desecration we need not wonder to find the Pharisees very solicitous upon the point, and very devout sticklers for strict Sabbath observance. Hence when they noticed his disciples—by which the twelve can scarcely be meant—gathering corn on this Sabbath day, they called Jesus' attention to the act.

A more unsatisfactory reply than that here given by Jesus to these Pharisees we cannot conceive. He neither upholds the Sabbath nor condemns it; he neither censures his disciples nor justifies them; but simply reminds the Pharisees of a certain occasion on which David and his companions violated a divine law likewise.

Now we know that the Psalmist was a very high-handed man both with laws and with morals; and to adduce his personal actions by way of example or justification is certainly very perilous. There have, it is true, been amongst all nations, and amongst none more than the Jews, laws which were much better broken than kept. But David was a man who stopped at no law, good, bad, or unmeaning. When his revenge or his lust was concerned neither the laws of heaven, nor, what is much worse, those of humanity, formed any obstacle to the Psalmist. We do not know whether Jesus would have regarded certain other transgressions of the law committed by the man after his "own heart" as valid and justifying precedents. The well-known one in which, according to our author, Jesus' own genealogy was concerned would hardly pass muster if cited as a warrant by anyone who had done a like deed. "Have ye not read what David did?" would scarcely be looked upon in these days as a sufficient exoneration to anyone who now took steps to dispatch a man whose wife he wanted. What the Pharisees thought of the extraordinary argument here offered to them, and what reply they made we are, of course, not told. For ourselves, Reader, we will take upon us to rule this Psalmist argument entirely out of court, either upon this or upon any other question.

The further precedent quoted by Jesus of the profaning of the Sabbath by the priests in the temple we are unable to say anything about. We do not feel sure we know what it means, though many commentators volunteer an explanation. It

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

has a very droll look, and brings to one's face one of the few smiles produced by a study of holy writ.

It is the unanimous opinion of theologians that Jesus here means himself. There is much reason to doubt, however, even if that view be true, whether it would be the impression gathered by these hearers.

6 But I say unto you,
That in this place is *one*
greater than the temple.

They believed in the wide-spread presence, if not omnipresence, of Jehovah, to whom they may well have taken Jesus to be referring; and though to Christians, or at any rate to Trinitarians, the two presences are synonymous, it would not be so to these Jews. However this may be, the pertinence of this declaration to the matter in hand is undiscoverable. For the ordinary explication that as the temple absolved the profanation of the priests, Jesus' own presence absolved any profanation the act of his disciples might contain is one of those far-fetched things that have no value when they have landed. The fact that David, or Jesus' own disciples, or his Father's priests, did a certain thing does not affect the intrinsic quality of the act in the smallest degree. The plucking and eating corn on the Sabbath day remains just where it did. Nor does the presence of Jesus affect the act one iota. Putting aside the fact that with an omnipresent being everything everywhere is done in his presence, the things both good and bad recorded in these Gospels as done in the immediate and tangible presence of Jesus are morally precisely the same as if they had been done at the antipodes.

Jesus had already, as we remember, told some Pharisees—possibly these same—to “go and learn” the meaning of this Scripture passage. If we take these Pharisees to be the same then addressed it is clear they had not gone or had not learnt. If they were not the same, it would appear that ignorance of the true meaning of this Scripture was somewhat general. Be this as it may, the preference of mercy to sacrifice will meet with universal approval. The difficulty is to conceive how sacrifice, especially the nauseous animal slaughter he once enjoined upon the Jews, can ever have been endurable to Jesus, or to any rational Being; and how human beings ever brought themselves to carry out such orders. As regards the latter, travellers who have been amongst savages tell us, however, that similar practices take place on our planet even yet.

7 But if ye had known
what *this* meaneth, I
will have mercy, and
not sacrifice, ye would
not have condemned
the guiltless.

A PLAIN COMMENTARY.

8 For the Son of man
is Lord even of the
sabbath day.

Seeing that Jesus was the author of the Sabbath, and that it was instituted by him to commemorate the completion of his own creative work, it is clear that his mastership of the subject must be absolute. His right to revoke, or continue, or in any way alter the institution is manifest. As a matter of fact, as we know, this latter has been done; though any personal authority of Jesus himself for so doing cannot be found. The Jewish Sabbath was abandoned by the followers of Jesus; and as we see shown to us every week, an entirely different day—the first instead of the seventh—and called the “Lord’s day,” was set apart for worship. Much diversity of view and of practice, it is true, prevails amongst Christians as to this same Lord’s day. Though the Jewish Sabbath is, as we see, totally disregarded by all Christians, some of the smaller Christian sects profess that some, though not all, the characteristics of that institution have been transferred to their Lord’s day. This assumed selection from the Sabbath and assumed transfer of what is thus sifted and selected to the Lord’s day are not worthy of serious consideration. Many Christians, however, who do not hold such a theory, and who have earned the death-penalty over and over again by their work on the original day—still illogically term the new day the “Sabbath.” The reason probably is that it is one of those agreeably sounding words so useful for religious purposes. Jesus’ chief Church regards this substituted Lord’s day with great latitude, laying more stress upon her numerous festivals. Amongst his secondary Churches the subject receives varied, but in these days upon the whole, sensible treatment.

Before we leave this subject, Reader, we will just say that we are warm advocates of a Day of Rest. Not, indeed, in its character of Sabbath, nor yet in its character of Lord’s day, but in its character of a day of cessation from labour and toil for man and for beast, and especially for man’s noble co-toiler the horse, we are staunch admirers of this ancient institution, and staunch friends of its modern and continued maintenance. Not because Jehovah rested and was refreshed on the Sabbath, but because man needs such a day of rest and restoration are we earnest upholders of that ancient and salutary institution.

After the foregoing incident was ended Jesus made his way into

their Synagogue, where there took place an occurrence which,

9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

10 ¶ And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

though a miracle, astonishes us much less than do some of the non-miraculous circumstances related in connexion with it. On this Sabbath day there were assembled in this Jewish Synagogue a number of people including Jesus, apparently some of his disciples, a number of Pharisees, and a man with a "withered" hand. The nature and reality of this withered hand were, it would appear, either known or taken for granted by all present. Before the cure of this withered hand takes place, the Pharisees are made to anticipate the event. They are apprehensive that a miracle is going to be done, and the Sabbath thereby profaned. They therefore ask Jesus if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, their own view of such an act being manifest from our author's statement "that they might accuse him." This Gospel style of narrating does not let us know with any certainty whether these Pharisees were the same who had just accosted Jesus concerning the corn-gathering or not. The most natural inference is that they were. And if that be the case, it is clear that Jesus' declaration touching Sabbath violation, and his own position regarding the institution had had no effect upon them—a result at which we cannot honestly express any surprise. But before he proceeds to what we moderns should call proof positive Jesus favours these Pharisees with another piece of argumentation.

We have remarked that Nature knows nothing of a Sabbath.

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days?

Accordingly sheep fall into pits, and other events of even greater urgency calling for immediate human activity transpire, upon that day as upon others. Though the question here put by Jesus does not recognize the fact, it was nevertheless the case that the lawfulness of taking a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath was a moot point; just as in our day there are yet to

be found farmers who will watch their hay spoil rather than house it even on a "Lord's day."

It is not difficult to see how these Pharisees might easily have disposed of the reasoning here offered them. The urgency of lifting a sheep out of a pit is evident even if not deemed sufficient

to warrant a breach of the death-forbidden prohibition of "any work" on the Sabbath day. But the restoration of a chronic withered hand could not well be brought under the head of urgency. Many, doubtless, were the Sabbaths that withered hand had remained withered. The beneficence of its restoration to health on this Sabbath is very evident; but the urgency of the act or its comparison to a sheep in a pit, is not at all evident.

Jesus goes on to propound a principle so wide and elastic as to virtually dissolve the Sabbath altogether. "It is lawful to do well on the Sabbath day." Those of us who are warm advocates of a day of rest on its own grounds apart from the Sabbath, the Lord's day, or from any other extraneous allegation or sanction, and who rejoice greatly at the beneficent modern legislation which restricts the hours of labour even on other days, cannot acquiesce in this dictum of Jesus except with very numerous reservations.

Jesus now proceeds to an argument of a very different order.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

We are not amongst those who regard miracles as overawing or over-riding either reason or morals. We look upon malevolent miracles, such as striking men and women dead, or arresting the motion of our planet to continue human butchery, with unmitigated detestation. Nor do ambiguous miracles much impress us. But we have an ardent admiration for beneficent miracles, and regard them as noble and potent persuasives. It is melancholy to learn that the kindly deed they here witnessed had no effect on these Pharisees; did not even soften them, but actually angered them. We should also have greatly liked to know what the man with the whilom withered hand thought of the lawfulness of Sabbath healing. But the retiring disposition of the subjects of Jesus' miracles and the little aid they seem to have rendered in the establishment of Christianity are far and away the most astonishing thing in these Gospels.

In this verse we have a picture laid before us, Reader, that we much doubt if it be possible for anyone now to even faintly realize or comprehend. That there have ever been human beings who, immediately after seeing a person work a beneficent miracle, could retire and "hold a council against him, how they might destroy him," is an allegation that stretches not simply belief, but even imagination beyond all sustaining power. The absolutely blinding

14 ¶ Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

and deadening nature of religious fanaticism is the only hypothesis that renders the picture even provisionally conceivable. The distorting nature and power of that dreadful incubus are, we know, not easily measurable. Its power to make appalling cruelty seem incumbent duty, and to convert transparent right and wrong into their opposites has been abundantly illustrated in every religion. It is not therefore easy to assign limits to the power of that horrible afflatus. Still it has its limits, and we doubt if it could accomplish what we here find ascribed to these Pharisees. Though reason is of no avail, facts are facts even to religious fanatics. And these Pharisees must have felt, if they believed the genuineness of the miracle wrought before them, that it could only be accounted for by supernatural agency. To seek to compass the death of a benevolent miracle worker is accountable for by no known human motives.

When, too, we remember that these men were trained in the religion of the true Jehovah, and that it was the very same Jehovah in human form whose "death" they here retired to plot, the picture becomes so grotesque that it is not possible to contemplate it with any degree of gravity.

The next Gospel tells us that Jesus "looked round about on them with anger." The third Gospel ascribes the incident to "another" Sabbath.

It is not stated how the menacing intentions of these Pharisees came to the knowledge of Jesus. Of course in one sense he was aware of those intentions before these Pharisees themselves were. But the phrase here used seems to imply that the fact had been conveyed to Jesus in some natural way. Most likely these Pharisees had made no secret of their hostile purpose.

15 But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

It is clear from this and other withdrawals that Jesus for a long time avoided danger, for we read that he "hid himself," "conveyed himself away" and other like phrases; and it is in every way pleasant to learn this. Martyrdom is a fate that multitudes of men have nobly resolved to endure as a last resort; but premature or sought martyrdom has something forbidding about it. It is, we hope, permissible to avow a regret that the martyrdom of Jesus, even if ultimately essential and inevitable, was not staved off still longer. Indeed we cannot help the further regret, though we do

not know if it be a pious or a heretical one, that Jesus was ever put to death at all. It feels surpassingly strange to think that Jesus was obliged to be put to death; and that therefore these Pharisees or somebody else were bound to bring that event about. To us, Reader, the Christian scheme is a "scheme" whose appropriateness and beauty are indiscernible, though we have made many efforts to focus our mind and our heart so as to perceive and to feel those qualities therein.

Jesus was accompanied in his departure "thence" by great multitudes, though we do not know whence or whither he or they departed. It is remarkable how much less interesting and agreeable a vague narrative is than one that is specific and definite. We also read of these great multitudes that Jesus "healed them all." The generation to which Jesus came seems to have been a remarkably sick and diseased, as well as perverse, one.

Were our author striving to stultify himself and mystify his readers, it is not easy to think how he could more efficiently do so than by such verses as this. Charging great multitudes to keep a secret is too vapid even to amuse us. Such allegations of vast and widespread publicity with attempts at concealment have a very bad effect upon readers. No reason is assigned why the precious knowledge possessed by these great healed multitudes should not be imparted to others. For we are unable to agree with our author that making good what Esaias had spoken is an adequate reason for anything.

When we think of the interesting items he might have given us in the space occupied by his tedious Old Testament extracts, it is scarcely possible to help feeling some annoyance with our author, presuming him to have been Matthew, one of the Twelve. Apart even from what he might have further told us of his Master, it would have been a hundred times more interesting than quoting Esaias, to have told us how he himself had fared in his memorable expedition and whether he had freely given the remarkable powers he had freely received. Such regrets are indeed vain, but it is difficult to avoid feeling some irritation when we find

16 And charged them that they should not make him known :

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

ourselves called upon instead to deal with such prophetic insipidities as these here brought before us.

But we shall not dwell upon them. Our author's loose citations show how little he himself regarded exactness in prophets, and how freely he treated their nebulous lucubrations. Esaias may consciously or unconsciously have written this passage as a prophecy of Jesus of Nazareth; but for any useful purpose he might as well have held his peace. The only practical effect of pointless predictions is to mystify those who read them. Any one who feels any interest in what was meant by such terms as my servant, bruised reed, smoking flax, silence in the streets, and sending judgment to victory, will find in Christian commentaries the opinions of theologians, if not of Esaias, duly set forth. The condescending and patronizing references to us Gentiles are much marred by finding ourselves termed dogs by Jesus himself a little further on.

The curing powers of Jesus are now brought to a stringent test.

22 ¶ Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

A subject is somewhere discovered in the shape of a poor creature possessed of a monstrous combination of afflictions. He is blind, dumb, and in the occupation of a devil.

Jesus "healed" him, by which term ejection of the devil appears to be meant. And either in consequence of that riddance, or in addition to it, sight and speech were restored.

A case of this kind is adduced, no doubt, as being thought especially striking, because especially miraculous. But the truth is, it is far less effective than a simpler and more probable case of healing. In reading a medieval chronicle, an apocryphal gospel, or any other miraculous narrative, we feel strongly how much more plausible and effective are the simpler and more natural miracles, if the phrase be allowable, than the elaborate and far-fetched ones. In the Old Testament miracles, it is their preposterous character even more than their size and their purpose, that drives men away. It is a most significant fact that probability and naturalness of surroundings should so strengthen the credibility of even the non-natural. An overdose of the miraculous produces the same result as an overdose of anything else.

Here we have a human being blind, dumb, and insane. If we take the blindness and dumbness to have been produced by the devil

when the latter took possession the case is, of course, much simplified. If not, we have no option but to consider this poor creature to have been one of those blind mutes now occasionally brought into the world; the improbability of such calamities befalling the same individual being too great to be entertained. A demented blind mute is a human being in name only. In such a case healing must have meant re-creation rather than restoration. If the deprivations were, as we have supposed, congenital, sudden restoration would involve adjustments in which it is difficult to see how personal identity in any real sense could be preserved. The greatly lessened effect of complicated and elaborate wonders as compared with simple and distinct ones is a curious testimony to the fact that even in miracles—as in morals and in other things cognizable by men—the laws of the human mind must be complied with, if Heaven wishes to produce a satisfactory result upon men.

After the performance of this exacting miracle we read, as usual,

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

that the spectators, as we presume "all the people" means, were amazed, and gave vent to their feelings by asking themselves, "Is not this the son of David?" Jesus does not

seem to have set the matter at rest by a reply. Perhaps it was wiser at this time to leave this matter open, for it had a decided political bearing. In what sense Jesus was a son or the son of David our author has shown in his first chapter, and we must rest content with the information there given. Besides, the other and real sons of the carpenter, who had the actual blood of David in their veins and the eldest of whom was actual heir to the Jewish throne, might have been compromised had it been made known that they were the representatives of the once royal house of Israel; and as that house was never restored, such an inconvenience would have been altogether purposeless.

A disquisition on devilism now follows. The Pharisees, on

24 But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

hearing of Jesus' exploits in exorcism, account for them by asserting that he is in collusion with Beelzebub, the prince of devils, by whose aid Jesus is enabled to eject an occasional member of the terrible fraternity.

We have an advantage over these Pharisees on this subject, for we know from what took place between Jesus and Beelzebub in their interview in the wilderness, and on the exceeding high

mountain, that in spite of a certain degree of familiarity and a noticeable degree of urbanity, there is nevertheless an entire estrangement and antagonism between the two. We see this illustrated, too, in this very matter of possession. Jesus certainly expelled a considerable number of Beelzebub's subordinates. On the other hand Beelzebub took possession of one of the twelve Apostles even, and unhappily was from some cause or other not exorcised. He was even dangerously near taking another—the chief—as we shall see later on. He had, too, no less than seven devils in one of the most eminent early Christians, but these were happily cast out. There can be little doubt that in many other like cases unknown to us Beelzebub and his subordinates were at work; for we have high patristic authority for ascribing to them and their machinations that fearful crop of heresies and heretics that harassed so greatly the early Church. We see, therefore, how entirely ungrounded this theory of the Pharisees as to an understanding between Jesus and Beelzebub really was.

But Jesus proceeds to show them how improbable such a notion was in itself. "He knew their thoughts";

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

from which we see that these Pharisees had expressed their real thoughts and had not hypocritically professed a theory they did not hold. We may just remark that this and the preceding verse are a typical example of

Gospel lucidity as to the presence of these Pharisees at the exorcism in question.

It is not necessary to dwell upon this assertion of the ill effects of internal dissension in a kingdom, a city, or a house. It was an ancient piece of wisdom. But, as we know, the reiteration of a saying, a principle, or a supposed piece of wisdom by Jesus gives it in pious minds a vast additional depth and importance. This saying has been used as all ill-defined, sweeping assertions usually are. It has been quoted to put down healthy diversities and to seek to enforce an unwholesome uniformity as well as to enjoin a wise unity, and to sensibly and mutually waive differences. As a matter of fact, too, kingdoms that have perished have done so mainly not from internal discords, which denote activity, if nothing else, but from torpor and corruption, which have left them victims to hardier conquering races. And Christianity, which has long, indeed ever, been a divided household, is much more likely

thus to continue to stand than if the longed-for reunion of Christendom should stifle the energies now so diversely and variously displayed in that "household."

The kingdom of Satan is a curious thought. Is it an independent sovereignty, or only a sub-kingdom under the suzerainty of the kingdom of heaven? All we know is that these two kingdoms are, or purport to be, at deadly enmity; and why the kingdom of Satan is not crushed by its presumably stronger rival is a problem that even theologians have abandoned in despair. The two, however, seem to have co-existed from time immemorial.

As a mere repartee this is excellent. But what an admission is here made! "Your children" accomplishing the same exploit! This reminds us, Reader, of the famous contest between Moses and Aaron and the Egyptian sorcerers, in which these latter converted their rods into serpents, just as Aaron had done his. Eighteen centuries ago the art and profession of exorcism seem to have been a flourishing one in certain localities. It is not difficult to see the scope it would offer to the enterprising.

But if these Pharisees were bound to account for Jesus' exorcisms, was not Jesus bound to account for "their children's" exorcisms? If an explanation was needed in the one case, surely it was in the other. If these children cast devils out by collusion with Beelzebub, that would be the very hypothesis Jesus had just scouted. By what agency, then, was it effected? Jesus again and again accords to false Christs, false prophets, and even false followers, the power to cast devils and do other great signs and wonders; but he nowhere states whence such powers were obtained. They were not obtained from himself. And he has just proved how they could not come from Satan. Whence, then, did they come?

Without in any way doubting the explanation of his own exorcisms here laid down by Jesus, we must in fairness say that we cannot imagine the virtues of an "if" more strikingly displayed than they are in this verse, considered in its argumentative capacity. Matthew, of course, does not give us any reply by these Pharisees. His narrative gives, or is intended to give, the impression that though they encounter Jesus again and again, they are stunned and dumbfounded by what he says to them. But when

28 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

we come to the fourth Gospel we find that instead of being dumb-founded they were in the habit of retorting with much vigour, if not success. If for no other reason than the loss of Jesus' own rejoinders, it is greatly to be regretted that Matthew habitually suppresses the Pharisees' replies.

We are sorry to say there are many ways known to modern housebreakers of spoiling a house without binding the householder. Indeed, that is the very last thing moderns who are expert in their profession would think of doing. We thus see how progress has taken place in every department of human effort, the perverse as well as the worthy.

But what is the point set forth in this extraordinary illustration? According to commentators, Satan is the strong man, the world is his house, and men are his goods, and—yes, Reader—Jesus is the housebreaker. We must decline either to concur with or to traverse this explanation. But if it be a correct one, is not correspondence in the central feature of the simile wanting? Has Jesus bound Satan? As we shall find, he certainly had not at the time this singular simile was spoken; and many things, alas, lead us to believe that Satan is still at liberty.

A poor, narrow sentiment: the very essence of all intolerance.

29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

The best comment on this verse is found in the fact that Christianity is itself rent into sections which openly denounce and anathematize each other. It is very remarkable that Jesus has

had less success in securing harmony and unanimity in his followers than any other religious founder. None of them, indeed, have succeeded in this point; for conflicting schools are found in every religion; but in none are they so marked and glaring as in Christianity. We say no more on the religious aspect of this principle. But we protest against any application of it in other things. It is to diversity both of view and of method that the best results in political, social, scientific, economic, literary, industrial, and all other fields of human thought and effort have been and will be due. The search for truth is vain if it be approached from one side and in one way only. Some of the best work the world has seen has been achieved by men who had no belief in the Prophet of Nazareth, and even by some who were firmly and avowedly against

him, or at any rate against the creed he founded. What a costly lesson it has been to mankind to learn that seeing eye to eye, and profession of identical beliefs, are no true requisites to the co-operation of good men for good purposes! It is only just to remember the opposite and better thoughts Jesus has elsewhere expressed; including, curiously enough, a declaration in which the first clause of this verse is exactly inverted.

After all that has been said and written concerning the solitary

31 ¶ Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against the Holy Ghost* shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

unforgiveable sin here formulated by Jesus, it still remains the mystic offence it has ever been. It lies entirely beyond the pale of investigation. And it would have been well if this had been recognized. For the uncertainty of meaning of this unpardonable sin caused it to be much hinted at in some of the bitter theological controversies of past times. And in the gloomy history of religious mania and religious insanity the imaginary committal of this sin figures greatly. Even the minds of some

eminent Christians have been clouded and even unhinged by the fear or supposition of having committed this indelible transgression.

Though we are here dealing with an entirely mystical subject, the declaration that sins against the Son of Man, that is against Jesus himself, are forgiveable is worthy of note for the personal generosity it displays.

Making a tree good and making a tree corrupt are figures of

33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by *his* fruit.

speech we are unable to comprehend. The knowledge of a tree by its fruit has been already set forth in the sermon on the mount.

It does not appear very clearly to whom the salutation "genera-

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

tion of vipers" was addressed, nor whether the whole of Jesus' contemporaries or a section only are thereby meant. It was most probably intended for the Pharisees, in speaking of whom

Jesus often used the epithet vipers.

It is not possible for any one to have a much worse opinion than ours, both of the generation then living in Palestine generally and of the Pharisee portion of it in particular. To this last portion there are several similes taken from the animal kingdom that might

with some measure of fairness and appropriateness be applied. But we cannot honestly concur in the term "vipers." It is a harsh savage epithet, but little in accordance with the maxims of conduct to enemies and evildoers propounded on the mountain. It is not generous, nor do we believe it to have been just. The customary term of reproach used by Jesus to these Pharisees was that of hypocrites. This again we believe to have been but very partially deserved. When Paul was a Pharisee he was no hypocrite; and both he and Jesus himself accord to these same Pharisees consuming zeal, which indeed is evident enough from these very Gospels. Our knowledge of these men derived from other sources, gives us the idea that they were fanatically sincere. That many assumed Pharisaism as a cloak, is only what has been done in connexion with every other religious cult also.

It is therefore, not pleasant to find Jesus calling his enemies vipers and hypocrites. It reminds us of those mutual aspersions of Protestants and Papists, and of those fearful descriptions of the Puritans and Covenanters by their enemies and *vice versa* which were so obviously flagrant and unjust. Violent aspersion of enemies was in past times the custom in all things; not only in religions, but in war, and in contentions of all kinds racial, international, sectional, literary, and all others. Antipathies were vehement and were expressed accordingly. In these latter ages a more excellent way has been found. Feeling towards and treatment of opponents have gradually softened and improved, until now fundamental differences of belief and opinion are not inconsistent even with friendship, much less mere charity and forbearance. Nor is this due to any alleged general weakening of convictions; nor to the fact that many of the things that once led to fierce antipathies amongst men have become obsolete, though this latter happy fact has had its influence. It is due mainly to the fact that all reasonable men see that the respect they feel to be due to their own convictions and their own sincerity is due to the convictions and the sincerity of others.

"How can ye, being evil, speak good things?" is a curious question to address to men, and not a very likely one to effect any improvement in them. Nor can we forget that the men so addressed were not philosophers priding themselves on mere human reason and wisdom, but men who had been carefully trained in, and the most prominent adherents of, the only true religion the

world had up to that time possessed. If we are to judge the tree by its fruit Judaism was but a sorry plant.

All religions address themselves to the feelings, not to the judgment of men. Their appeals are to man's

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

emotions, and chiefly to two of them, hope and fear; seldom, if ever, to his intellect and his reason. We are not about to enter into any discussion as to the relative claims of the head

and the heart as guides to human conduct. We rejoice, however, to see the ever increasing supremacy of the former. Even in the region of philanthropy, where, if anywhere, the heart seems entitled to its own way, how much wiser and more effective is the guidance of the head—of that cold mental calculation of results, if you like to put it so—is transparent. If human reason be not infallible, it is at any rate a safer pilot than the human heart in most things. We are indeed told that this latter is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, a view which we are glad to be unable to assent to.

Good hearts and evil hearts are here contrasted in accordance with that diverting bisection of humanity into good and bad, wise and foolish, sheep and goats, wheat and chaff, lost and saved made by the religions. Jesus does not say whence the misdeeds of good men and the redeeming qualities of bad ones proceed. We may remember that even out of the heart declared to be after Jesus' "own heart" there proceeded some very evil things indeed. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit," possesses about as much truth and real value as figures of speech of the kind usually possess. Religious founders may classify men as they please. Men generally will act prudently in distrusting the absolute goodness of even the best men, and still more so in refusing to regard the worst as wholly bad, whilst attempts to classify the bulk of mankind may be left to those who cannot find something better to do. The only value we can find in this passage is the acknowledgment it affords of the known law that actions of any kind repeated often, produce in the human, as in all other organizations, a tendency or disposition rendering it easy to continue such actions, and difficult to do their opposites.

This is an alarming announcement. If all the idle talk that has taken place amongst human kind—for the word

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

men presumably includes the gentler sex also—has to be gone into and an account thereof given at the judgment day, that day will be a longer one even than one of the days

in which the world was created. Many a poor wight will be occupied a long time in giving an “account thereof” under this head, and the heavenly authorities greatly wearied therewith.

The strange judicial principle here declared that men will be judged by their speech has greatly exercised

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

theologians, as indeed it well might. They point out, as is quite true, that Jesus elsewhere seems to lay down our actions as the determin-

ing criterion in judging us at the last day. Elsewhere again—and most frequently of all—he lays down faith as the quality decisive of men’s future abode. It will be better to defer this subject until we reach a later chapter, in which Jesus lays down at greater length the considerations that will guide him in sending some of us to the better land, and others to a place prepared for a well-known personage and his angels.

Some scribes and Pharisees now make a request to Jesus. The

38 ¶ Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master we would see a sign from thee.

appearance of these scribes affords an agreeable variation from the monotony produced by the constant appearance of Pharisees only. We shall find, however, that Jesus held very much

the same opinion of the former as of the latter. Presumably these scribes and Pharisees had heard what fell from Jesus after he had ejected the devil from the blind mute. If so, it is clear that that address had neither discomfited them nor satisfied them. They accordingly ask Jesus for a sign. To these men devil-casting proved nothing; for by common consent, their own children did it also. They evidently wanted something unequivocal. And it must be owned that they made their request courteously, and modestly, which is all the more creditable when we reflect that the terms in which Jesus had spoken of them, and the epithets he had applied to them, were not such as to conduce to a very amiable frame of mind.

Theologians are very severe upon these scribes and Pharisees for asking Jesus for a sign. They also avow their belief that no sign would have satisfied these critics, for had they not seen or heard of Jesus’ many wonders? But would it not be as well, Reader, to

remember that contemporary miracles never do impress people? Miracles need the mellowing influence of time; just as the very best of men require to be dead and buried before they can become acknowledged saints. Let us remember how insensible men generally are to the wonders taking place in our own day. Trains full of pious pilgrims leave for shrines where miracles are declared to be of daily occurrence, and where any one may see the rows of crutches and the beautiful floral offerings which attest the cures that have been wrought. Every day are not *séances* held where portents that set science at defiance are witnessed and recorded? Do not wonderful stories of faith-healing come regularly to us from intelligent and sober men? Then how comes it men turn a deaf ear to all these things; how comes it that the few who accept any one set of contemporary marvels are the first to scout and deride the other sets?

Jesus declined to give these men a sign. He adds to this refusal a declaration that "no sign" shall be given to that "evil and adulterous generation" save the sign found in the story of Jonah and the whale.

What Jesus meant by the saying that "no sign" should be given to that generation but the sign of Jonah we leave to those accomplished theologians who are, we fully believe, alone able to deal with it. There is some doubt as to the sense in which the word adulterous should be taken. We are not aware that this generation, bad as it was, was particularly given to the odious crime of adultery. Many commentators declare the word to be a trope intended to declare the unfaithfulness of Israel at this time to Jehovah. If this be so, it is a simile that should not be pressed too closely.

It cannot be doubted that these scribes and Pharisees were

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

familiar with the story of Jonas. Whether they had ever suspected that it contained so important a sign is open to great doubt. It may well be doubted, too, if they felt themselves much enlightened after this declaration of Jesus that he himself, if by son of man they knew he was referring to himself, was going to spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth as Jonah had done in

the "whale's belly." We feel far from sure that the cleverest and wisest of moderns would comprehend what a person now meant by

declaring his intention to spend three days and three nights in the "heart of the earth."

Such was the sign and, according to Jesus himself, the only sign vouchsafed to these men and that generation. We are not told what these scribes and Pharisees said about it. But we feel quite sure what they thought about it.

The story of Jonah and the whale seems to have been intended to flout and deride good sense and credibility. It is, too, unrelieved by any of those better features sometimes found in Oriental stories of a like type. We have indeed reached a strange pass, Reader, when we find such a story adduced for purposes of corroboration.

It is strange to reflect that Jonas was a more successful preacher than Jesus himself. It is a startling instance of the well-known uncertain ratio between merit and success.

41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

The queen of the South, who visited Solomon, is generally thought to have come from Arabia. If so, we see in the phrase "uttermost parts of the earth," that language of accommodation to current ignorance Jesus always used in humanly cognizable matters. However "condescending" such an accommodation may have been, the resulting inaccuracy remains transparent, and constitutes a con-

descension of another kind much to be deplored. It would appear from the account we possess of the visit of this lady to Solomon that she was greatly impressed with his wisdom and with his ostentation. Of this latter there remain descriptions only; but we still happily possess Solomon's works, in which the former is treasured up. The repute now enjoyed by Solomon's wisdom is not great. Like his life and walk, it was of a very mixed kind. Good sense and nonsense, good advice and bad, sensible remarks and foolish ones are mixed up in it in a very extraordinary fashion. Pessimism is the only thing that can appeal to Solomon's writings with any real satisfaction.

More about devilism. Reader, it is heavy, weary work addressing one's thoughts to such matter as is here presented to us. Just as there are physical garbages no one likes even to touch, so there are ideas it is odious to have in one's mind

43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

even momentarily. These three verses—the present and two following ones—are matchless. The world's literature will be sought in vain for anything to approach them.

It appears from what Jesus here states, that when a devil leaves or is cast out of a man, he—the devil—feels restless and discontented, and walks about in dry places. This last item seems at variance with what happened to the 2000 swine. For in that case the devils immediately after entering the swine, made straight for water. But possibly what Jesus here lays down, though it has the appearance of a general proposition, was not meant as such.

From this it appears that when one of these devils take possession of a poor fellow he regards the latter as his “house.” We also learn from this “I will return,” how devil-casting may be but a temporary achievement. A human being “empty, swept, and garnished” is a picture we leave to those able to follow such imagery.

It would seem from this that devils are of a sociable, gregarious disposition, and clearly like company. And yet it seems inconceivable that when these eight spirits entered the poor fellow and “dwelt there” they could be comfortable. One would think they were almost as much to be commiserated as the unhappy creature giving them house room. That the last state of “that man” was worse than the first is very clear; but Jesus omits to state in what way he had had any part in bringing back his old tenant, still less the seven new ones. Jesus, as we know from a well-known case, could be very angry. He was evidently so in this instance, and when we are angry our reasoning is seldom sound. The “even so,” which brings the illustration to an end, shows us clearly that Jesus' object was to denounce and, as far as we can judge, to enrage these scribes and Pharisees. Willingly, Reader, do we pass on.

It is greatly to be regretted that the very interesting occurrence recorded in the remaining verses of this chapter took place in connexion with, and under the influence of, the foregoing address of Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees who had asked him for a sign; an address which we

44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

46 ¶ While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother

and thy brethren stand
without, desiring to
speak with thee.

infer from this verse had not been confined to the scribes and Pharisees, but had been spoken to the people generally; a fact which seems to give a wider scope to its reference to this "wicked generation." It is most unfortunate that the severe and wrathful address Jesus had delivered, and apparently not finished, should have been in such proximity to an incident of a pleasant, homely kind, with which we associate and look for love and tenderness only. These Gospels give us the impression that Jesus often made rapid transitions of temper and mood. But it is very clear that in the incident now recorded Jesus had not altogether recovered the amiable frame of mind appropriate to it.

Whilst Jesus was speaking someone interrupted him to apprise him that his mother and his brethren wished to speak with him. It is evident that Jesus was not pleased with this interposition; and it must be owned such an interruption of his discourse would be annoying. If, however, he had intended to continue the matter he had in hand at the time, this interruption cannot be lamented.

"His mother and his brethren." We have to study this incident under a customary Gospel disadvantage of not knowing where it took place. Possibly it may have been in the neighbourhood of Nazareth where Jesus' mother and his brethren presumably resided; or it may have been in the Capernaum district whither they had come to see Jesus.

Most authorities consider this the same incident as that recorded in the next Gospel, where we are told Jesus' "friends" wished to lay hold of him as they considered he was beside himself. The two are certainly found in the same connexion. Others think his mother and brethren were anxious for his safety, seeing how he was rendering himself so obnoxious to such powerful bodies as the scribes and Pharisees. The fact that they "stood without" seems to show that these relatives had only just arrived; had not been listeners to Jesus' discourse to the people.

At this time Jesus' mother must have been a woman of from 50 to 60 years of age. Jesus himself had entered the fourth decade of human life; and his brothers, whose names are given in the next chapter, would no doubt be at this time grown up men also. John tells us in his Gospel that these brethren did not believe in Jesus; and he gives us some unpleasant words that passed between Jesus and them on the matter. It is not easy to

understand why, even if Jesus himself had failed to satisfy them, these brethren had not been convinced by Mary herself of the annunciation of Gabriel, of Jehovah's fatherhood of Jesus, of the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt; those indubitable proofs so well known to us. The same may be said with regard to Jesus' sisters. For though we have no specific statement that they did not believe in Jesus, their entire absence from any participation in Gospel events leaves no doubt that they regarded him in the same manner as his brothers regarded him.

The man who interrupted Jesus to inform him of the presence of his mother and his brethren and of their wish to speak to him received an answer he could not have expected. For Jesus "answered and said unto him" "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" What answer the man made or could make to such a question it is not easy to imagine. He seems to have very wisely left Jesus to give his own answer. We submit, Reader, that the question, "Who is my mother?" is not a nice nor a becoming one either for Jesus or for any one else to ask.

Jesus replied to his own interrogation by saying that his disciples were his mother and his brethren. Many commentators say this is a pathetic saying; some say it is a very profound one. Well, we can only say that to us it is a strained, poor conceit. The declaration that any one who does his Father's will is his—Jesus'—mother is one of the most unpleasant figures of speech we have ever met with.

Our author does not tell us if Jesus resumed the strange discourse the announcement of the presence of his mother and his brethren had disturbed. Not that we are concerned about our non-possession of that continuance if it took place. Of more interest and value than a dozen such discourses would have been the knowledge of what Jesus' mother and brethren spoke with him, and he with them.

48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

MATTHEW XIII.

By the word sea - side Christian commentators tell us that the edge of the lake of Tiberias is meant. There is little reason and less need to doubt the assurance. Efforts to be wise beyond what is written, however, often characterize those learned men not less in matters of fact than in attempts to fathom deep spiritual things.

However great may have been the multitude of spectators on the shore, the proportion who could hear a person sat in a ship would not be great.

In addressing these great multitudes Jesus adopted the system of parables. His reason for selecting this method of conveying—or rather not conveying—to them his teachings

Jesus gives us a few verses further on, and a very singular one it is.

Jesus begins with the parable of the sower; a bit of simple,

ordinary imagery from which probably more sermons are preached than from any other Gospel paragraph. It is a piece of symbolism that offers a wide field for free expatiation; and its detailed items may be turned to a variety of uses, which Jesus' own exegesis of his parable does not much restrict. This parable, too, has the great advantage of being based upon a natural operation of a universal and perennial kind, seed-sowing. In this it differs from many of Jesus' parables, which are based upon customs of a purely local and Jewish kind now no longer in existence. In these latter cases the medium used has become unknown, and requires to be itself searched up and explained.

The art and methods of seed-sowing vary considerably in different countries; and in the same country they vary greatly according to the nature of the

CHAPTER XIII.

3 *The parable of the sower and the seed; 18 the exposition of it. 24 The parable of the tares, 31 of the mustard seed, 33 of the leaven, 44 of the hidden treasure, 45 of the pearl, 47 of the draw-net cast into the sea; 53 and how Christ is contemned of his own countrymen.*

1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.

2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up.

5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

6 And when the sun was up they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.

8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirty fold.

ground and of the seeds sown. The sower mentioned by Jesus seems to have been a very easy-going, not to say careless, one; for with a thoughtful sower but little of his seed will fall either by the wayside, in stony places, or among thorns.

But Jesus strangely enough does not mention what is by far the most important thing connected with sowing—preparation of the ground. In the case of all the more valuable seeds and products, it is the ploughing, the draining, the tilling, and the fencing of the ground itself that are the vital processes. Without these, scattering seeds and expecting crops are only becoming in children. But it will be better to leave this parable until we come a few verses further on to Jesus' own explanation of it.

Many think this was a phrase or sort of proverbial expression current at the time, and hence often used by Jesus. We are glad to meet with the view that this phrase is not of Divine origin; for it is not a pleasant one, and does not improve upon analysis.

9 Who hath ears to hear let him hear.

Most commentators suppose that these disciples were in the ship with Jesus, and interrupted his address to the people to ask him this question, which at a suitable time was a very sensible one; and that Jesus suspended his speech to the multitude whilst he privately explained matters to these disciples in the long passage which here follows. This supposition is not altogether a pleasant one; hence other expositors have tried other explanations, which, however, are not more satisfactory. The subject becomes still more confused when we refer to the accounts given in the two next Gospels.

10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

Leaving these multitudes, therefore, to ponder upon what they had already heard, or to while away the time as best they might until he resumed his attention to them, Jesus apparently gave an elucidation of his parable in the ship to these disciples.

11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

It is usually taken that these disciples were the twelve. But when we remember the despatch of these on a memorable expedition, and that we have not met with a word concerning their return, the matter is open to much doubt. Taking it, however, that these disciples were the twelve, and knowing how largely they shared our human frailties, they must have felt elated to hear that they had to know the "mysteries of

the kingdom of heaven ;” whereas to the multitudes on the shore Jesus declares such knowledge “is not given.” We have already observed how uncertain the phrase kingdom of heaven is in itself. The mysteries of that kingdom obviously lie beyond even conjecture. Nor do we know if these disciples divulged any of those mysteries ; most likely they were not permitted to do so, though elsewhere they were bidden to proclaim what they had heard “in the ear.” If, indeed, these parables and Jesus’ own explanations of them are the “mysteries” here referred to, they cannot be pronounced hopelessly mysterious even to very ordinary people.

Reader, we look at and think of this verse with sincere pain ; for it is the worst teaching we know. We care not how it be applied ; spiritually, morally, or materially. It is sometimes said that it is a natural principle we see at work throughout Nature. To us, such a fact, so far as it is a fact, counts nothing. For Nature as a moral standard we neither feel nor profess regard ; her many iniquities forfeit any claim to the supposition that her operations are conducted on moral principles. The attempt to establish an analogy between Nature and Christianity is well known. It is an attempt that in some points flatters Nature, in others Christianity.

To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away, is teaching that shocks every noble and humane feeling within us, and feels to be the very climax of injustice and inhumanity. It seems, too, in another sense to display the most infelicitous adaptation and management. And it is teaching which all the best and worthiest efforts of mankind are directed to counteract and reverse. Elsewhere Jesus, as in other matters, supplies his own antidote. “Sell all thou hast and give to the poor” is an injunction which, ill-advised as it is, shows us that to take from him that hath and give to him that hath not is a course which, like its opposite, can boast of heavenly sanction also.

In spite of all the banter that has been poured upon the latter clause of this verse, we must say that it gives us the most vivid notion of omnipotence we have ever come across.

Jesus now explains why he uses parables in speaking to the multitudes on the shore. It was in order to avoid enlightening them. “Therefore speak I

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance ; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables ; be-

cause they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

in parables because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." Or, as it is given in the third Gospel,

"that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." We think it was a great pity, Reader, Jesus did not openly say this to the faces of these multitudes. They might be dull of hearing and seeing; but all but the very dullest would have perceived the very peculiar point of this declaration.

In the last Gospel this elevated and heavenly principle is set before us still more clearly and forcibly. Speaking of the non-belief of men in Jesus, the writer of that Gospel says, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart." This divine blinding and hardening process seems to have been ever since, and to be still, applied to the great bulk of our species.

We are so wearied with Esaias and with his prophecies that we leave to those who may be willing the study of this passage. What Esaias really did say and the occasion and connexion of his saying it are obvious enough on reference thereto. But with regard to the alleged occult allusion in this passage to the multitudes gathered in front of Jesus' ship on this Tiberias lake shore it is much the best to abandon all intellectual search, to leave in the domain of faith what was clearly intended to remain there, and to simply accept Jesus' own assurance on the point.

Later on we shall find many laments by Jesus of the strange obtuseness displayed by these disciples. The spiritual sight and hearing here ascribed to them were only very gradually operative. Even the constant presence of Jesus unfolded the spiritual senses of these disciples very slowly and, as we shall find even at the end of our narrative, but very partially also.

Though there is little doubt that by the prophets and righteous men here spoken of Israelites only were meant, the desire to know hidden things has characterized men in all nations and all ages. The search after the unknowable is one of the

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen

them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

most pathetic things in human annals. And the fact that when and because not discovered it has often been invented is one of the most melancholy. The small proportion which in every period of the world's history the true religion has borne to the many false ones is one of the most saddening facts the human mind can reflect upon. The vast bulk of our race have gone to the grave cherishing deplorable impositions and delusions.

In these latter ages the desire and search for the unascertainable have greatly abated; the love of knowledge, however, has even increased, but it has taken the wiser and incalculably more beneficial form of seeking only those things which we are clearly able to find out of ourselves, and leaving anything that may lie beyond our capacities severely alone. To those not satisfied with this course are there not that truly marvellous book of "Revelations," which brings these Christian Scriptures to a close, and many other like disclosures of the unsearchable?

We now come back to the parable of the sower and to Jesus' own explanation of it, which is here given. And it must be admitted that to speak a parable and then have to explain it in order to render its meaning intelligible, is a very tame proceeding.

In the first place the seed means the "word of the kingdom."

18 ¶ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.
19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

The way side represents those who hear the word but do not understand it: and the fowls of the air represent the devil, who comes and picks up this non-germinating seed.

Some men, then, hear the Gospel, but do not understand it. This, at any rate, is very candid. Some theologians, indeed, try to show that blame in some way or other attaches to these men for their want of understanding; but there is nothing in the text to support such a view. It is a fact rather to be deplored than censured. Besides, do not these very theologians strikingly show us that though they—the theologians—understand the Gospel, they understand it in very different senses? If such be the case with those profound and learned men, need we wonder at the statement here made that some men do not understand the word of the kingdom at all? Most readers will be sorry to find birds of the air likened by Jesus to the wicked one. Some kinds of birds are

no doubt nearly pure depredators ; but most of them are not, but are of value in many ways, and some even render service in protecting seeds from those insectivora which might more appropriately have been likened to the father of evil.

The stony ground represents shallow human beings who are easily impressed and easily lose the impression. Such men are all surface and have no earth. They are feeble plants, that a storm, or even a little unfavourable weather, will suffice to destroy. The scorching sun represents tribulation and persecution ; a simile which some commentators, ungratefully forgetful of all we owe to our great luminary, pronounce to be a very fine one. These shallow men cannot stand such trials, and the good seed perishes within them. It may just be remarked that even in our own day, though persecution has happily passed away, the same traits may still be seen in superficial types of humanity. Shallow men are afraid to be unpopular, and the shallowest of all are afraid even to be unfashionable.

The thorny ground represents men who are possessed of root capacity and receive the seed into it ; but unhappily the ground is already pre-occupied by or becomes jointly occupied with other seed of a very different and very hostile kind. The word of the kingdom has in this case to grow up side by side with thorns, by which are meant "care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." This attempt at joint-growth is a failure ; the thorns, being much the hardier, choke the word of the kingdom, and there is no fruit ; the sower's trouble is thrown away.

This is one of many alarming references of Jesus to riches and to the inconsistency of Christianity therewith. Happily modern exegesis is equal to the difficulty ; even the passage of a camel through the eye of a needle declared by Jesus to be "easier" than the entry of a rich man into the kingdom of God no longer gives trouble. In our time the relations of Christianity to wealth are, as we have remarked, most cordial.

Finally, the good ground represents Christians ; who hear the word, understand it, and bring forth fruit in

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.

21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23 But he that re-

ceived seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

varying measure from thirty up to a hundred-fold.

What, Reader, are the practical lessons we can learn from the study of this parable? The first seems to us to be that the Gospel seed meets just the same fates amongst men that other seeds, both religious and otherwise, also meet. The receptivity of and responsiveness to all kinds of teaching vary immensely in men. We see precisely the same results exhibited in other religions as in Christianity. All creeds have their lukewarm and their earnest adherents; men who would lay down their lives rather than give up their faith, and men who would not sacrifice even their comfort for it. Every religion shows us men who ignore it; men who transiently profess it; men whose hearts are in worldly pursuits, though concurrently professing faith and its ends and aims; and earnest believers who try in varying degree to follow out their belief more or less fully and strictly. The same variety of reception may also be seen amongst men with seeds of all kinds unconnected with religions altogether.

A very striking feature has developed itself in connexion with Gospel seed since the time of Jesus. The Gospel plant, like other plants, has been greatly influenced by its environment and has given rise to astonishing varieties; varieties so divergent as in many cases to present no tolerable resemblance to each other. The seeds of all these varieties keep being sown, though the sowers regard each other with much misgiving. "Christian" missions are now begun and the foundation stones of buildings laid in the same street for the propagation of rival doctrines; doctrines which in the ages of faith would have caused men to seek each other's lives.

But far the most important lesson, if we could clearly gather it, connected with this parable is that of its bearing upon human responsibility. There is, however, little or nothing here to help us. The question may seem to be raised, but if so the answer is eminently problematical. If men are way sides, stony places, thorny grounds, and good grounds respectively, it is not easy to see where their responsibility comes in. But the subject leads on to the old question of the freedom or determinism of the human will; and further still to the moot question which has ever divided Christianity into two conflicting schools—Can men choose salvation, or are they *ab initio* pre-ordained vessels of mercy and of

wrath, elect and non-elect respectively? Whether the human will is free or not, we shall decline to follow the subject into those quagmires.

It is usually understood that Jesus here resumes his address to

24 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

the multitudes on the shore. This could not be gathered from the way in which this verse is worded; it is only gathered from what we find subsequently. This whole chapter is a curious illustration of Gospel lucidity.

Jesus resumed his address to the people with another parable similar in thought and subject to the preceding one. A man sowed wheat in his field. But he had unhappily an enemy who came in the night and scattered tares amongst the wheat. When the two plants came up together the malicious act came to light.

Thereupon the sower's servants come and ask their master if he

wishes them to go and gather the tares; a very sensible suggestion.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

This the sower forbids them to do, assigning as his reason that in rooting up the tares the wheat also might be plucked. "Let both grow together"; at harvest they can be sorted, the wheat stored and the tares burnt.

Poorer, and worse moral teaching than this is, in our opinion, nowhere to be found. The plain, deliberate lesson of this parable is that evil things are to be suffered to grow as well as good ones; we are to make no effort to extirpate the former. This parable is a condemnation of all the best and noblest of human endeavours; and if acted upon would soon reduce our race to the barbarism from

which it has emerged. The history of human progress is simply the history of man's struggles with and conquests of evil.

Some of his hearers must surely have felt a desire to remind Jesus of one of his own previous similes, how the thorns choked the good seed and left no harvest of the latter for any one to reap. The result of letting tares grow with wheat is a meagre crop and quality of the latter whatever else it may mean. This "Let both grow together" is one of the worst injunctions anywhere to be found.

A few verses further on Jesus elucidates this parable also to his disciples. These hearers were left to elucidate it for themselves as best they could. But then we may remember that Jesus tells us that "hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." We are not amongst those who think their loss was very great.

Jesus' third parable is also one connected with seeds : but not for the purpose of illustrating human conduct.

31 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field :

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds : but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

The object of this parable is to set forth the nature of the kingdom of heaven by comparing it to a grain of mustard seed, which Jesus tells us is "the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs," so that the birds of the air lodge in it. Christian botanists have had much difficulty with this declaration. It is not easy even amongst Oriental flora to find a plant answering

this description, and we are duly warned not to take the statements "least amongst seeds" and "greatest amongst herbs" too literally ; they must be regarded as a rhetorical expression merely. It may be observed that religious claimants are always safe so long as they confine their declarations to the supernatural. Men have to die to find out the truth of what they tell us on that subject. But when assertions are ventured upon natural subjects great risk is run. What are now so unpleasantly known as Biblical "difficulties" arise from injudicious statements of the Biblical writers upon natural subjects men were then either ignorant of altogether or entertained unfounded notions of.

One theologian very thoughtfully reminds us that the birds of the air are not to be here taken in the character in which they figured a little while back.

The small and humble beginning of great things is a truth that has often been illustrated in the world's history. In this respect the kingdom of heaven bears a close resemblance to many other good things, and to some, alas ! that are not good, notably to the false religions.

Jesus' last parable given to these multitudes is taken from quite a different field of human labour. The kingdom

33 ¶ Another parable spake he unto them : The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three

of heaven is here compared to leaven which a woman "hid" in three measures of meal, and which leavened the whole. It is very much to

measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

be feared that readers of this parable are now in the same position as to its meaning and its bearings that these hearers were; we may be readers, but do we understand the lesson? What is the true meaning of the chemical process here named in a spiritual sense; and in what way is human conduct concerned in such a process? It is not easy to see what are the true answers to these questions; whilst the fact that the "whole" is leavened is a result entirely contrary to that set forth in preceding similes of the workings of the kingdom of heaven in the world.

These three measures of meal offer a problem whose solution does not seem very likely ever to be arrived at. Many commentators expatiate at great length upon the point; they give their fancy free play, and certainly astonish us with what can be got out of three measures of meal. But, on the other hand, some of the more cold-natured and prosaic members of the brotherhood censure such poetic displays as vain and unauthorized expansions of Holy Writ.

We have seen Jesus' own reason for confining his address to these people to parables only. Our author here furnishes us with another. He declares that it was to fulfil a prediction which he here gives us. "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world," and which he asserts "was spoken by the prophet"; but which on reference we find the prophet certainly did not speak. What the prophet, whose name was Asaph, the writer of the seventy-eighth Psalm, really did "speak" was, "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us." And the whole Psalm is an exhortation to the people to give ear and learn. Such things as these, Reader, greatly undermine our faith not only in the accuracy but even in the integrity of our author.

It is a relief to find that there is no ground for the assertion that these four parables had been "kept secret from the foundation of the world."

Having dispersed this most unfortunate multitude Jesus left the

36 Then Jesus sent ship and came into the house; where his

the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

bring out the real meaning of a parable. The simple imagery of the sower and his wheat and his enemy and tares is here expanded by Jesus in a truly disquieting way. It is alarming to think that we do not possess any explanation by Jesus of the great bulk of his parables, and have consequently to rely upon mere human efforts for their proper interpretation. In such circumstances we feel, as we own we never felt before, the true value of learned theologians.

The first item in this exposition, that Jesus himself is the sower of the good seed, we see at once to be natural and appropriate; nor is it necessary to inquire how far the exegesis might be extended so as to embrace his servants and followers.

The next declaration, that the field is the world, is also clear and natural; except that during the last three hundred years, since the true constitution of the Universe has been known, it has been a source of legitimate wonder that our tiny planet, out of all the myriads of suns, planets, and stars that fill space, should have been such a special subject of interest to Jesus. Some extremely broad-minded men have thrown out the suggestion that Jesus' visit to us eighteen centuries ago, and the sacrifice he then made for us, are efficacious for the whole of the other bodies in space—the "world" in its larger sense—presuming they are inhabited. But the suggestion, like many others of a similar kind, solves a difficulty only by the creation of many fresh ones.

The good seed are "the children of the kingdom." It is not long since we were considering and lamenting a statement of Jesus that "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is thus clear that the same phrase may be used by Jesus not only in different but even in opposite senses. But we cannot be wrong in taking the children here spoken of to mean Christian believers; leaving the distressing matter of their many varieties in abeyance

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.

disciples followed him to get the tares of the field parable unfolded.

In considering the explication of his parable Jesus here proceeds to give to these disciples, we feel something approaching to consternation as we think of the amplifications needed to

for the time being. Much more doubt exists as to the meaning of the curious term "children of the wicked one." The idea that they are those sprites whom Jesus often cast out is negatived by what follows, and we are driven to the melancholy conclusion that human beings are meant thereby. Our race thus consists of two totally different kinds of seed, with, if we may follow the analogy, an obvious incapacity of being changed into each other.

We now come to the main point. We may remember that all the mischief that befell the sower and his field arose from the fact that he had an enemy. And mournful as it is to think of, Jesus has a great enemy, too—the devil. But there is this vital difference in the two cases. It was whilst men slept that the sower's enemy came and spoilt his field. Had the sower known of his enemy's intention, he and his servants would have watched and captured him; procured his punishment; and thus also saved his field and his wheat from damage.

But Jesus is quite aware of and witnesses the devil's proceedings. From some cause not humanly conceivable Jesus quietly watches the devil work all his mischief without interruption. Instead of arresting the wicked one, and staying once and for all his nefarious deeds, Jesus suffers him to proceed, with the disastrous results we see described.

It is not needful here to dwell upon this very painful subject. It is possible to hope the wicked one may some time be stayed. But we see little to rest hope upon. To sow tares amongst Jesus' seed is not the first mischief of the kind this same enemy has effected. Thousands of years before the time Jesus spoke this parable, at the very beginning of our race, the devil was permitted to totally spoil a most lovely paradise, and bring down our species from its high estate. There seems, therefore, but little to lead us to expect that evil may soon be stayed at its source. From this we learn yet once again that the example of Jesus is often eminently and entirely unsuitable for human imitation.

The harvest is the end of the world. This part of the simile is very difficult of application. It is impossible to make any tolerable correspondence between the human race and a wheat-field in this regard. All the wheat is sown at the same time; is all of the same age; and is all cut down together. With mankind the case is altogether different. The angel of death conducts his work

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

amongst us not with a sickle—save in such things as earthquakes, shipwrecks, and battle-fields—but by a touch of his finger of here one and there one. Sometimes he picks out a child; sometimes a youth; sometimes a ripened man or woman; and sometimes an aged, faded, or drooping one; his operations bearing upon the whole a striking want of resemblance to what could properly be considered harvesting.

The only way in which this simile can with any degree of appropriateness be figured, is to think of the grand total of the human race as reserved for final assortment until the end of our species and of the world. We have already remarked upon the jumble which Christianity makes of this subject. The passage of each individual at death to heaven or to hell, and the postponement of adjudication to one great day of judgment, are set forth with delightful impartiality. It may be observed that the emotional advantages of the former theory, enabling us to think of our departed ones, especially our children, as having passed into and now being in heaven, are so great, it offers such a means of appeal to the tenderest of human feelings, that it has for practical purposes overborne the other and more imposing theory. And with that strange capacity for looking upon one side of a doctrine only, so characteristic of pieties of all kinds, the acceleration of the misery of those who have not gone to heaven is never thought of. The appalling reflection that our departed friends have already begun their eternal round of suffering is never—and wisely so—dwelt upon.

The reapers are the angels. It seems to be universally assumed that good angels, the angels of heaven alone, are here meant; indeed Jesus distinctly states this. It must, however, surely be a very painful task, upon the whole, to those angels of light. The bundling and burning of human beings must be a fearful thing to those bright essences; enough, one would think, to mar their joy for ages after the event, if not, indeed, to sadden them for evermore.

There is, too, something rather humbling in thinking of heaven's angels gathering Satan's crops; and we are unable to see why Satan's own angels should not have attended to their own harvestings and carried their own sheaves into that "furnace of fire" which they will, we understand, remain in charge of for all time to come.

The heartrending picture set before us in these verses is all

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

the outcome of the permission accorded to Satan to sow his tares. We thus see that human wisdom and good sense can bear no resemblance to celestial good sense and wisdom. The passing by of the humanly "wise and prudent" in favour of babes is thus accounted for. The declaration that Jehovah's ways are not as our ways comes to us with crushing force as we think of these verses and this parable. And if we ask ourselves if it be

possible for us to assimilate human wisdom to heavenly the answer seems very doubtful. We do not think the sane human intellect could ever be trained to watch the deliberate sowing of tares with composure. Our conclusion therefore is, that though in matters pertaining to another world we must accept what heaven tells us, it is better to, indeed we must, in matters appertaining to this world, continue to follow that human wisdom which has in such matters been repeatedly proved to be a far better illuminant than any of the many celestial candles.

Having thus disposed of the devil's harvest, Jesus contrasts

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

therewith the fate of the children of the kingdom. Very few words indeed suffice for that purpose. They are to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This is an exceedingly pleasant

subject to dwell upon; and we would fain have had three verses also concerning it to reflect upon. But the exceeding paucity of Jesus' references to the Christian paradise has puzzled men ever since, nor can any of the ingenious theories started to account for it be regarded as having done so. It would have been most pleasant to have had a glimpse as to what awaits the elect of our race. What awaits the non-elect is as clear as it can be. No veil is thrown over that. It is a furnace of fire; and a human being placed therein is a picture we can realize, if disposed to do so, with horrible exactness. But human beings shining forth as the sun gives us no impression whatever, except that of a huge but most insipid and unsuccessful metaphor.

We should not, Reader, be faithful to the prime purpose of this work, if before leaving this parable and its explanation, we did not unburden our mind by saying that if this cumbersome, tedious,

and, on the whole, most inappropriate allegory had been dispensed with altogether, and the plain speech which so grave a subject merited, been used, half the words here spoken by Jesus might have given us a clear, specific, and tenfold more impressive notion of the two destinies he has in store for the human race, and the cause and reasons thereof.

Jesus not only gives the disciples an explanation of a former parable, but also adds three new ones. We

44 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

shall say but a few words concerning these. Allegories, after a time, become inexpressibly wearisome.

In the first of these three parables the kingdom of heaven is compared to treasure hid in a field—presumably for the sake of safety. In days before banks, safes, and other modern methods of dealing with valuables were known, this was not an uncommon practice; and curious methods of hiding money still exist in very out-of-the-way country places. A man, not the owner and hider of the treasure, discovers it, and hideth it afresh; apparently in the same field, though the reason for so doing is not obvious. Having done this, he goes and sells all he has to buy this field, evidently with the view that it is likely to contain other secreted valuables, a view which may prove very misleading. It is entirely unnecessary to dwell on the details of a parable like this. The method of acquiring treasure here laid down is certainly of very questionable morality.

The next parable Jesus gives is a far better one in every way.

The kingdom of heaven is here likened to a pearl merchant who, finding a pearl of great price, sold all he had to buy it. It is evident even to the extremest sceptic that if there be such a thing as religious truth, to find and get it is an object whose importance simply dwarfs all other pursuits. Granting the two premises

45 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

that there is a true religion and that we have the power to discover it with certainty, the most impassioned rhetoric that ever issued from a pulpit does not exaggerate, indeed does not half do justice to, the overwhelming importance of the search for religious truth as compared with any other or with all other objects of human thought. It is not the validity of the deduction therefrom,

but the shakiness of the two premises that renders religion such a subordinate matter with most men. For it is palpable that to obtain the true religious faith, even at the cost of all we possess, which are absolute trifles in comparison, at the cost of martyrdom, or at any other conceivable human cost, is a fabulously lucrative transaction.

But it is in religion, and in that only, that such a line of conduct is to be recommended. In its natural bearings the action of this pearl merchant was daring, if not rash. Men of a speculative disposition sometimes adopt such a course; sometimes meeting with brilliant success, but oftener with ruin. Endless wise sayings warn us not to place our all in a single venture.

In these latter ages the sacrifice of all other things for religion's sake is a principle that has been greatly modified, if not superseded. The literal abnegation of all worldly things for Christ was the early, and was long, the Christian ideal. Christian monasteries and convents still, indeed, exist, and the majority of Jesus' priests still immolate some of the most powerful of human feelings for their master's sake. But the generally current Christian theory and practice are that the good things of this world are combinable with the good things of the next. Hence staunch Christians are to be seen keenly pursuing wealth, pleasure, and other things precisely as the non-elect do. Such a view of the world is one of the many things that shows us how curious an adaptation of original Christianity the current type in many respects is.

This present set of parables is brought to a close by, perhaps, the most singular of them all. The kingdom of heaven is declared to resemble a net thrown into the sea, which brings to land "fish of every kind." The contents are then examined and sorted; the good kept, and the bad thrown away. To follow the usual method of parable exposition we have here the sea, the net, the good fish, the bad fish, and the sorters to be dealt with. But we shall say a few words about the fish only.

47 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

48 Which when it was full they drew to shore and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

As if wheat and tares, sheep and goats, were not enough, our poor race is now likened to good fish and bad fish. It must be owned that there is something humorous in thinking of their Creator terming some of his marine productions "bad." Still, many of the strange denizens of the deep are such peculiar types of animated

nature both in appearance and in other respects that the reproach cannot well be gainsaid.

Well, after all, Reader, wheat and tares, sheep and goats, good fish and bad fish are what they are by nature; and have had no hand or part in making themselves. Nor is a transformation possible to them. Even so is it with men, considered as believers and unbelievers, according to one of the two schools of theology into which on this vital point Christianity is divided; and which may well appeal to all these parables in support of its theory.

From a purely natural standpoint, such a bisection of the human race is unworthy of consideration. The drawing of such an imaginary line of demarcation amongst the complicated phenomena of human nature does religious founders little credit. Good and bad men exist in imagination only; and from the best men to the worst the gradations are infinite. The obvious fact that in any conceivable severance of mankind into two sections there would be little to choose between those nearest to but on opposite sides of the dividing line, has led to the theory that individual treatment in heaven and in hell may be adapted to accord therewith. It would have been all very well if Jesus had said this himself. It is but tame work attempting to supply what he omitted.

Besides, though the marked silence of Jesus about his paradise and the palpable fact that amongst the human beings who get there, there must be the same infinitude of variety in merit and worth noticeable whilst they are here, may leave room for picturing a graduated heaven, we do not see how there can be much gradation in being thrust by angels into a furnace of fire.

The first two of these verses are merely a repetition. In the third

Jesus asks the disciples if they have understood all these things. As Jesus knew the thoughts of these disciples just as he knew those of the Pharisees and of every one else, this question could not be asked for the sake of information. The disciples replied that they had understood.

How far readers of these parables can now say as much, it is for every man to testify for

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.

50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

himself. In any of the better senses of the word understood, we have no option, Reader, but to place ourselves with the great multitudes, who, as we know, heard, but did not understand.

Not that these parables present any difficulty in any of their outward aspects. In that sense they are simple enough; they might be placed in a book for young children. Nor do the elucidations given of two of them by Jesus raise any difficulty, except the incongruities inherent in such a mode of teaching; incongruities which, in books of fables and allegories, often render the "moral" or explanation appended so ludicrous. It is impossible for the most accomplished fabulist to compare man to a vegetable or even to an animal without the nonsensical parts of the simile being far more conspicuous than its "point." It is this that has banished, and justly banished, such a mode of teaching moral and immoral lessons from modern thought, and relegated books of fables to the topmost shelves of our libraries.

The sense in which we fail to truly understand these parables is that though the kingdom of heaven is therein compared to a number of things, we are not carrying away with us one single clear idea of what that kingdom is really like; of the principles on which it is based; or of the modes in which it really works amongst men. That the devil is the *fons et origo* of all evil and all mischief, and that Jesus refrains from suppressing him, is the one and only certain lesson we feel to be taking away with us from these parables.

There can be no doubt something is here left out; this "therefore" does not in any way connect the disciples' answer with what Jesus proceeds to state. This verse is a very obscure one altogether. What is meant by a "scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven" even commentators do not know, as the irrelevant matter they offer in place of an intelligible explanation clearly shows. That Jesus' own treasure combined both new things and old is very evident.

After finishing these parables Jesus left the district and proceeded to his "own country," by which it is understood that Nazareth is meant. We thus see that by "his own city" Capernaum is meant; by "his own country" Nazareth. Presuming that the sea-side where these parables were delivered was the shore of Lake Tiberias, the distance to Nazareth would be some twenty miles. It seems very probable that this return of Jesus to Nazareth had some connexion with the visit of his mother

52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe *which is* instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things* new and old.

53 ¶ And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

and brethren, and with what they desired to "speak with him" about. It was not more than twelve months or two years at most since he previously left Nazareth and came and dwelt in Capernaum. The suggestion of certain sentimental commentators that Jesus yearned to see his old home and be amongst his own again hardly seems an adequate reason, inasmuch as his mother and his brethren had, as we have seen, just come to see him. This visit and Jesus' return to Nazareth had manifestly some personal or domestic origin.

Whilst at Nazareth, Jesus went on the Sabbath into the synagogue and taught those present, and astonished them with his wisdom and with his mighty works. Unless we suppose that, like other teachers and preachers, Jesus gave in substance the same matter at the different places visited, this wisdom is now lost to us. These mighty works, too, are unrecorded; our author, however, adds below that they were "not many." The next Gospel assures us that "He could there do no mighty work," save the healing of a few sick folk.

The astonishment of these Nazarenes expressed itself by their asking each other, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" and other questions. In a place like Nazareth people would all know each other; and it is evident that these people knew Jesus and his family very well. On the other hand, Jesus, altogether apart from supernaturalism, would know these people intimately also. He had lived thirty years amongst them, and the avocation of a carpenter is one that, more than most other occupations, brings a person into contact with others.

"Is not this the carpenter's son?" How entirely mistaken these people were in this supposition we, of course, now well know. But it is easy to see how they fell into this mistake. Jesus was the son of the carpenter's wife; and there was evidently nothing known to these people to warrant them in supposing him to be other than the carpenter's son also.

It is abundantly evident from these Gospels that outwardly Jesus did not differ in appearance from other men. Those aureoles we see in paintings round the head of Jesus are not taken even from these Gospels, but from that pious fancy which has woven so many

54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, inasmuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

other kinds of aureole around the Prophet of Nazareth, and around other religious founders also.

Most Gospel readers will feel regret that our author does not spare a word or two—even if only to state if he were at this time living or dead—concerning the worthy carpenter whose two genealogies are now recognized as one of our permanently insoluble problems.

The many strange vicissitudes of Royal families have seldom offered us a more striking instance than that shown in the case of Joseph. The descendant of the kings of Israel had become a simple village carpenter. In these democratic ages the contrast between kings and carpenters is not regarded as it was once regarded; and there are not a few who think that the true order of precedence is, carpenters—kings. Besides, the kings of Israel were, as we know, given as a punishment, and they did not fail to fulfil that object. So regarded, it becomes possible to look upon Joseph's non-occupation of his throne in a very favourable light.

It appears that Jesus had four brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas.

“And his sisters.” “Are they not all with us?” The number of Jesus' sisters is not stated. How we seem to miss them in these Gospel narratives! It is not possible for any one, Reader, to have less sympathy than we have with the sneers some

56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

of the older sceptics were so fond of. But we are bound to own that we should have better liked what we read of Lazarus' sisters to have been recorded of Jesus' own. It is, however, possible that when Jesus died they were still but young girls; though the way in which they are here spoken of does not give us that impression.

How prejudicial familiarity is to every kind of halo is well known. Intimacy may strengthen esteem and personal attachment, but it is destructive of all the more romantic attributes. The essential requisite of hero-worship is the want of personal acquaintance. This is the reason

57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.

why posterity regards the great dead so markedly differently from the way in which their contemporaries looked upon them. Nor is this simply due to the fact that the deeds of great men were in their lifetime regarded as of a disputable nature. It equally applies to non-disputable things. A great poem or a great oratorio

carries its merit on the face of it; and that merit is as discoverable at first as ever it can be. But the poet and the musician must die to be unreservedly applauded.

According to this verse their knowledge of Jesus and of his very ordinary surroundings, blinded these Nazarenes not only to wisdom but even to mighty works also. "They were offended in him." As regards wisdom, it is only too true, Reader, that real wisdom has often given deep offence. Before the time of Jesus many men had paid for their wisdom with their lives.

But to be offended with mighty works, if good works, is not intelligible. We read some time back of a certain "mighty" work which Jesus performed, which gave, and justly gave, great offence, and led those who witnessed it to request him to take his departure. But the more usual recorded works of Jesus, the opening of blind eyes, deaf ears, and cleansing of lepers, could not possibly give offence, one would think, to any one. The non-appreciation of such works by spectators and subjects can only be explained by a resort to some supposition of an agency similar to that which caused the multitudes on the shore not to understand the parables. The two-fold source of miracle power might make men doubt many specimens of that power, but could scarcely make them offended with the purely good ones.

In what way these frequenters of the synagogue gave expression to their offended feelings we do not know. But we have Jesus' reply. He declared that "A prophet is not without honour save in his own country and in his own house." This is said to have been a proverb current at the time; and no doubt it was based on the experience of many prophets. Taking the word prophets in its usual sense, we are not so much surprised they did not meet with any honour in their own locality as that they met with any anywhere else. For of prophecy and of prophets regarded as predictions and predictors, we have the very worst possible opinion. If future events can be foreseen, they are fixed and must be fulfilled. As a belief, this is about the worst men can entertain; but happily they can only entertain it very loosely. Men will try to mould the future, profess what they will. But the belief is none the less harmful. This belief prophecy professes to turn into knowledge; fate is thus fixed beyond all escape or recall. The massacre of the little Bethlehemites, for example, was predicted: it had to be fulfilled. Nothing in heaven or earth could evade it.

But bad as prophecy is, prophets are still worse. A fixed future is bad enough; but a clear knowledge of it, even though it be unalterable, would have its redeeming features. But this, all prophets—except the rash and obviously false ones who fix dates and speak clearly, and so get into trouble—take good care not to impart. They foresee this fixed future, but impart it to us in enigmas only; an arrangement that simply combines every conceivable disadvantage.

Jesus thus inferentially contrasts the honour he had met with elsewhere with the want of it shown by his own country and his own house. When we call to mind the terrible woes he had already denounced against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where most of his mighty works were done, on this self-same ground that those mighty works had failed to impress and to be honoured by these peoples, it is very difficult to see the point of the contrast.

“And in his own house.” A ray of light here falls upon a singularly painful subject. Jesus’ admission that he was without honour in his own house we find practically exemplified elsewhere. The fact that those who knew him best did not believe in Jesus is by far the most significant and most important fact disclosed in these Gospels.

That those who had known and been with him during the many years that to us are a blank, and who were united to him by the closest and tenderest ties did not believe in Jesus is indeed a portent. One would have thought these brethren and sisters would have gloried in the angels’ visits and other wonders that surrounded the nativity, and that they would have loved to talk of them with Jesus. It almost seems as though those marvels were known to the writers of this and the third Gospel only; for neither Jesus nor any one else ever names them or alludes to them in any way.

Not less strange was Jesus’ attitude to his brethren and sisters in return. It is clear he did not work upon their hearts and draw them to him. That sovereign grace which, without any effort on Saul’s part, converted that virulent and raging Pharisee into a vehement and enthusiastic disciple, and which had cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, was not vouchsafed by Jesus to his own brethren and sisters, to those nearest and dearest to him.

Those very unpleasant questions, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" and the reply given to them by Jesus himself that his disciples are his mother, and sisters, and brethren, seem to some extent explained in this present verse. With his brethren more particularly, the relationship was not indifference but estrangement. In the fourth Gospel we have some very bitter remarks that passed between them and Jesus recorded.

In the next Gospel we read, speaking of the present incident,

58 And he did not
many mighty works
there because of their
unbelief.

"He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them." It seems clear from the case of the two

blind men and other instances, that for the effective working of a miracle there needs sympathy and *rapprochement* between operator and subject; though the validity of such vehicles as aprons and handkerchiefs for the conveyance of "virtue" seems not easy to reconcile with this view. And for the working of punitive miracles, like that of Peter upon Sapphira and her husband, there is obviously no need of sympathy between operator and victim.

Whatever be the explanation, we read that Jesus "could do no mighty work" in Nazareth. When we think of the calamitous consequences to the people of Capernaum, of Chorazin, and Bethsaida, of the mighty works which Jesus had been able to achieve there, the people of Nazareth seem to have been most fortunate in this respect.

In the second Gospel version of the saying of Jesus that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country and in his own house, there is the significant addition of "and among his own kin." We also there read that Jesus "marvelled because of their unbelief." Let us hope his astonishment at the unbelief of his own kin and of the Nazarenes did not imply the fearful resentment that awaited the unbelief of the people of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida.

MATTHEW XIV.

THE Herod here named was a son of that Herod who some thirty-two years ago had sent the Magi to Bethlehem to find Jesus when an infant. He was the ruler of Galilee and some adjacent districts. As a Nazarene, Jesus was thus a "subject" of his.

CHAPTER XIV.
 1. *Herod's opinion of Christ. 3 Wherefore John Baptist was beheaded. 13 Jesus departeth into a desert place: 15 where he feedeth five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes: he walketh on the sea to his disciples; 34 and landing at Genesareth, healeth the sick by the touch of the hem of his garment.*
 1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus.
 2. And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

The courage of John in accosting Herod and denouncing his crimes was deserving of great praise. It seems singular he did not take the opportunity of telling Herod the great news that the king of heaven was resident in his dominions; and that he, John, was in the world as Jesus' herald merely. Hence when, after John's death, the fame and works of Jesus reached Herod's ears he ascribed them to an entirely wrong cause. We read in the next Gospel that Herod heard John gladly. It is very strange John did not tell him all about Jesus.

In the account of John's death given by the great Jewish historian who wrote about the same time our author is usually considered to have written this Gospel, a different reason is assigned therefor. But it is not one of those cases in which two accounts are contradictory or exclude each other; it is a case in which both reasons may have been true.

3 ¶ For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

We thus see that even in these Oriental tyrannies popular opinion counted for something. It would have been interesting to know how the multitude received John's death.

5 And when he would have put him to death he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

6 But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

8 And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me

Rash vows and their consequences figure greatly in Eastern history. A well-known Biblical story tells us how a notable Israelite sacrificed even his own daughter in pursuance of a hasty vow. That oaths or vows which involve something wrong and wicked should be broken rather than kept seems so obvious, that

here John Baptist's head in a charger.

9 And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

choose the bigger of two evils instead of the less, is to abase our reason.

The woman's malice must have been very strong to impel her to prefer John's head to the many things the opportunity offered. With ignoble natures the gratification of revenge seems a delight outweighing not only all gratifications of the better human feelings, but even the gratification of far more important and less transient selfish desires.

The "king"—as the Roman emperor permitted these petty vassals to be called—kept his word. This "honourable" fulfilment of a vow to do a crime is but one of endless like instances of one of the strangest of human vagaries. The supposed greater call to keep our "word of honour" than to adhere to a great moral obligation has had copious illustrations even in later times than Herod's. Though not quite analogous, an essentially kindred spectacle is to be seen exhibited in presumed civilized countries even yet. A man who receives an injustice or offence is in "honour" to encounter the offender and take his life, or—as is generally much likelier—have his own taken; and though such proceedings are now in the main burlesques, now and again a genuine case still occurs.

The true estimate of verbal commitments of the kind in question is set forth on the highest of all authority in that book of Jonah, references to which we were a little while ago considering. Jonah had announced in Nineveh the word of the Lord that "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." But the people of Nineveh made such excellent use of those forty days that "God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not." At this non-fulfilment of his prophecy Jonah was greatly angered; from which we see that even prophets can regard their word of honour as of more importance than considerations of humanity. Nor can we doubt that in the case of the promise given by Jesus to Iscariot that he should sit upon a throne and judge a tribe of Israel, the sensible precedent we have just named will be followed.

It is better not to make any effort to realize the horrible picture

it is extraordinary how the contrary can even have been entertained. When a man vows to do wrong he places himself in a small dilemma certainly, but one out of which a very small amount of good sense shows the way. To

10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

11. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

here set before us. The beheading of John in the way that process was at the time carried out, and the conveyance of his head by this damsel to her mother, are best left unthought of. And best left unthought of also are those inscrutable ways of Providence which accorded permission to such a scene. If heavenly wisdom be unsearchable, the effort to trace it must obviously be fruitless; and it is certainly often not a wholesome effort.

The only lesson derivable by us from this shocking and premature end of the Baptist is the purely natural one of the necessity of discretion in all human actions. It seems clear that John had spent a good portion of his short public life in prison, which means the loss of all he might have accomplished in that period. And it is quite clear his imprisonment and sacrifice served no useful purpose, as the after history of the parties concerned in it, and who were entirely unworthy objects of it, showed. However admirable the courageous reproval of such persons' misdeeds by John may have been, it bears no sort of practical proportion to what was lost thereby of far more important work. The repeated avoidances of danger by Jesus are in themselves excellent precedents.

After John's disciples had buried their master, they came and told Jesus; but Matthew does not add what they did afterwards. Pious commentators venture to add what Matthew omitted, and assure us that John's disciples joined themselves to Jesus, and thus obtained the glorious exchange of a divine for a human master. It is not necessary to enter into this speculative question; but disciples of John who needed initiating into Christianity are met with even in Christian scriptures long after this event, thus showing that the Baptist had left his own famous question, "Art thou he?" a dangerously open one to many of his followers.

13 ¶ When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

The sad message brought by John's disciples was evidently "news" to Jesus. Such, at any rate, it is here given as being. The all-discernment ascribed to Jesus in these Gospels on the one hand, and the astonishment he displays, and the way in which "information" influenced his movements on the other, are a medley it is

impossible to form any consistent notion of. Orthodox notions of Jesus compel us to realize that he possessed from eternity foreknowledge of John's end and of its very hour. To read, therefore, that "tidings" of it immediately affected his movements feels a stilted and not altogether edifying kind of narration. We may remember that when Jesus heard of John's imprisonment he "departed into Galilee;" here, when he hears of John's beheading, he departs "into a desert place." Historians and moralists delight in tracing back and showing us how events of great consequence have been brought about by trifling things. It would be difficult to give a more striking case than the one now before us. The excellence of a girl's dancing caused the death of the Baptist, and influenced the movements of the Creator of the Universe!

Our author's very peculiar style of narrative is here conspicuously displayed. We left Jesus at Nazareth upbraiding his relatives and neighbours for their non-belief. Here—after parenthetically giving an account of John the Baptist's death—our author resumes his record by stating that Jesus "departed thence by ship." There could be no ships at or near Nazareth, unless they had got there by miracle. Hence it seems clear Jesus had left Nazareth after a very short stay there. Where he went to from Nazareth, where it was he received tidings of John's death; the "thence" from which he took ship, and the desert place he made to, our author thus in his inimitable manner leaves us to make out as best we can. We thus enter upon the consideration of the following occurrences without any idea of their locality.

But apart from this Gospel vagueness, what our author does give us is a highly curious sketch. A person leaving a place by ship for a "desert place apart," being followed on foot by people out of the cities, is a description more remarkable for variety than perspicuity. Any one who can frame to himself an intelligible picture from such materials must be a born expositor.

On seeing the multitude which had gathered and followed him,

14 And Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Jesus, we are told, felt compassion for them and healed their sick. This last feature reveals the object of this multitude in following Jesus. His reputation as a healer would cause the friends of sick folks, and the patients

themselves, where able, to seek Jesus. Without entering into the subject of the objective reality and miraculousness of Jesus'

healings, it is not out of place to remember how easily such a concourse as that here named can be got together. Less than two centuries ago the pressure to get the king's touch in our own country was something incredible; and the failures to cure availed nothing against the real recoveries that "followed" the royal contact. Even in these degenerate times, multitudes wend their way to miraculous shrines, and some, at least, come back really improved or cured. It is with healings as with prayer. Many prayers are beyond all question "granted;" for do they not come to pass?

With night coming on, a miscellaneous multitude of five thousand men, besides women and children, in a desert place would be a strange, weird scene. The disciples suggested to Jesus that he should send this huge multitude to get themselves victuals in the villages; from which it seems this desert place was not in any very out of the way spot. Jesus, however, had a better

plan.

This miracle, as is well known, enjoys the distinction of being the only one recorded in all the four Gospels; and the four accounts give it with many variations.

16 But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

In reply to the disciples' suggestion Jesus answered, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat;" a bit of pleasant, gentle banter, when we remember Jesus knew they could not do it.

To this the disciples rejoined that they had but five loaves and two fishes. These Jesus commanded them to bring to him.

17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

18 He said, Bring them hither to me.

19 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

We can, of course, form no idea of the means by which any miracle is accomplished; nor is it of the least use to speculate whether these five loaves and two fishes were prodigiously enlarged, or, after being duly portioned out in a natural sense, the necessary additional supply of fresh ones was extemporized.

After being created, the distribution of such a vast mass of bread and fish presents no light problem. This verse gives us the impression that the whole was broken and handed by

Jesus himself to his disciples, and by them given to the multitude; but the time such a process would occupy renders it difficult to think of it. No doubt in the presence of miracle-power all difficulties vanish; but when a miracle is encompassed with miraculous surroundings, the whole becomes little better than a phantasm. By the time this multitude, allowing a very small number for the women and children, could have received and eaten their portion of bread and fish, the time would, indeed, be getting "past."

We can frame no conception of this event that feels agreeable or satisfactory. The raining of manna which took place to accommodate the Israelites is a very much more captivating picture. In this case, the five loaves and two fishes to begin with, feel an awkward feature; and both the production and distribution of this mass of food impress one, somehow, as tedious and circuitous.

It is noticeable that Jesus followed the usual Jewish practice of blessing or giving thanks for bread before partaking of it; a practice which has come down to us in the amiable form of saying grace before meat. Whatever we may think of the ceremony as applied to bread obtained in the ordinary way, a miraculous supply is an occasion on which such a ceremony is eminently appropriate and called for.

It was no scanty meal; "they did all eat and were filled;" and

20 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

we may well think that these people would be hungry to begin with. Nor was this all. No less than twelve baskets full of fragments were left; the surplus thus being greater than the purely natural supply to begin with. Those who practically know what is required for a meal

for even a hundred people will best realize the mass of food needed for and the time required to serve it to five thousand men, besides women and children.

Frugality is ever admirable. Still fragments of bread, and of raw or cooked fish—whichever may have been the case—are not inviting; they would, however, have a value in this case as mementos or curiosities. It was fortunate, too, that the necessary twelve baskets were not wanting. We cannot also help the remark, Reader, that our author can be very exact when he wishes.

Of all the miracles ascribed to Jesus, these feedings of a multitude in the manner here described, and re-enacted in the next chapter, commend themselves to and impress us least. The provision

of a meal may be termed a beneficent miracle; but it is one of so exceedingly transient a nature as to influence us in a correspondingly ephemeral manner. Such an exercise of miracle power has an insuppressibly trivial look with it, which reflection upon what such power might have been made to accomplish does not lessen. The opening of one single blind man's eyes exceeds these feedings as much in impressiveness as in dignity.

After this remarkable repast had been completed, Jesus, for some reason not disclosed, at once constrained his disciples to take ship and cross the lake. He himself then proceeded to disperse this great multitude. And when we think of a concourse like that "sent away" at such an hour to make their ways back to the "cities" from whence they had come on foot, we feel that the scene must have been a very strange one. It must, one would think, have been a great day for the new faith. The return of these five thousand men, and these women and children, amongst them many personally healed ones, into these cities must surely have leavened those places with mighty faith. Such a multitude was itself the population of a "city." But our experience of the inefficacy of mighty works on Gospel multitudes, and Jesus' own lamentations and menaces thereupon, have warned us to no longer expect any of those natural and—we cannot help still feeling—inevitable results from such works the absence of which presents so formidable a problem to us.

There is a pleasant old Eastern notion to the effect that God prays; prays that his own will may be good. The idea of the Deity praying is, however, one that entirely transcends human comprehension. Hence in this case the Second person of the Trinity offering prayer to his two co-members of the Godhead is a subject to which the human faculties are altogether unfitted to be applied. It is evident that though the word pray may be here used, it can bear no resemblance whatever to the signification of the word as applied to a human being. Omnipotence, omniscience, and immaculateness praying! The idea is one that quite startles us.

Bringing us back again in his own quaint way to the ship which was carrying the disciples across the lake, our author tells us how it was meeting with a like

22 ¶ And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the

sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

fate that once befell another—or possibly this same—ship when carrying these disciples and their sleeping master. The waves were running high, and the wind was contrary. Remembering that this lake was only five miles wide—in many places much less—people must have been given to setting out in stormy weather; for there was hardly time for a “storm” to arise on such a sheet of water during the short time needed to cross it.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

Whilst this ship was in the midst of the sea, that is some two miles from either shore, battling with the storm, a strange sight fell upon the disciples’ eyes. It was Jesus walking upon these tossing waves and approaching the vessel; a particularly pleasing act. The reasons for the exercise and the non-exercise of miracle power on the part of its possessors it is not possible for the human mind to discover; especially does its non-exercise upon seemingly most appropriate occasions baffle us. Walking across this lake must often have been more convenient to Jesus and his disciples than taking a vessel, though there were open to miracle power even still more expeditious methods than walking across it.

Submission to the limitations and inconveniences of the natural, with unused power to cast them aside; and outbursts in which Nature and natural laws are brushed aside with masterly ease, are the common characteristics of all miraculous records. It is vain for us to search for any intelligible principle in a mixture so capricious.

Apart from all other and more important considerations, it is much to be deplored that our author should have written his Gospel history in the third person, on the ground of the greatly lessened effect thereby produced in all such passages as this. The use of the word “we,” instead of the word “they,” would in all such instances as this have imparted a much more vivid and lifelike feeling to the narrative.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

One would have thought that men who had been for some time past engaged in healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and casting out devils, were hardly the men to cry out “for fear” at the sight of what they took to be a spirit. But from the first to the very last these disciples comport themselves in a manner ill befitting their endowments. Their want of faith, want of courage, and want of so many other things that so many

plain, un-heaven-aided men have nobly displayed, are very disheartening, and have a very sinister effect upon a reader's estimate of these disciples, and of Jesus' influence upon them. The record of such disparaging facts regarding these disciples by, presumably, one of themselves, is often used as an argument for the truthfulness of such a record. It is a dearly bought piece of consolation.

The disciples' cries of alarm at this spectre were soon dispersed by a few cheering words from Jesus, who must have been close to the vessel for his words to be audible in a "contrary wind."

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

The remembrance of natural considerations as we read a miraculous story feels to be an idle sort of thing; and yet we are obliged to dwell upon and fix in our minds the natural environments of a miracle to prevent the whole becoming entirely visionary.

"And Peter." Ever since the sending out of the twelve upon their memorable mission, of which mission not a word of mention or allusion has since been made, we have been under much doubt how far the disciples mentioned from time to time since that event up to this present incident were the twelve apostles or not. All uncertainty is here set at rest. Here are the twelve again beyond all manner of doubt. We are glad to meet with them again. We should certainly be puzzled to mention any single head on which we could honestly profess any admiration for these twelve. Still in any history a reader comes to feel a certain attachment to the figures therein, and it is always agreeable after an interval to meet them again.

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

How he and his eleven colleagues had gone on in their magnificent excursion of freely healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and casting devils throughout the cities and towns of Israel, our author nowhere says a word. What we have been looking forward to is not even named. This absolute silence is keenly disappointing. Never before and never since has such a mission been sent out in the world. And to think that we do not possess one single account of this memorable mission is most discouraging. Those visits must have stirred the cities of Israel to their very depths. The free exercise enjoined by Jesus of the powers he had conferred upon these twelve, especially that

of raising the dead, must have caused great commotion in these cities of Judea. It is true the secular Jewish history of the period makes no mention of any such occurrences; but, as we know, we cannot build upon secular history in sacred matters. It is the utter silence of these Gospels and apostles themselves concerning this marvellous mission that is so unaccountable and so deplorable.

This strange silence, and the absence of any traceable results of this famous mission in after events, incline us to a gloomy view of its success. The efficacy of the powers given by Jesus to these disciples cannot, of course, be called in question; nor can we doubt the free exercise of them which Jesus commanded. We are driven to the depressing conclusion that the "inquiry" for the "worthy" in these cities was not generally successful, and that there was much shaking of dust from the disciples' feet. This great apostolic expedition is thus shrouded in impenetrable obscurity, and there it must be left.

The Gospel mode of reciting events does not afford us the faintest clue to the time of, or interval between, given occurrences. What time elapsed between the setting out of the twelve and their rejoining Jesus it is vain to conjecture. The most natural impression is that it was not a long period. Apart from a well-known declaration made by Jesus at the time the disciples set out, many things of a purely natural kind lead us to infer that the going over the cities of Israel was left incomplete. Jerusalem, the chief city of Israel, was clearly not visited.

Peter's object in wishing to join Jesus on the water has been variously surmised. His natural impetuosity,

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

a desire to emulate his master, or impatience to determine whether the appearance was really Jesus or some hallucination may be chosen from. Be this as it may, Peter ventured to come down from the ship on hearing Jesus say "Come"; and for a time seems to have

been successful in his walk. Trepidation, however, overtook him, owing, according to Matthew, to the fact that "he saw the wind boisterous." The famous Church-rock was beginning to sink, and cried out to Jesus for help. This timidity seems scarcely either intelligible or creditable. For in a natural sense, Peter, being a fisherman by calling, must, one would think, have been a competent swimmer; whilst, in another sense, could not any one of his eleven

companions in case of his being drowned have raised him up again ?

Jesus personally saved his chief disciple ; caught him with his hand. The scene cannot have been very dignified ; and like all other hair-breadth escapes in supernatural chronicles, is very tedious and dull. Peter's varied career was not in the very smallest danger of being cut short.

Whilst walking on to join the ship, Jesus reproached Peter with the words, " O thou of little faith," a happy description not of Peter only, but of all the Gospel personages. A more sceptical set of men than the apostles it would not be easy to find or imagine even. " But some doubted " is the very last thing recorded of them. The faith in an unseen Jesus shown by many of the successors of these apostles puts to shame the weak belief of the men who for years had shared the company and even the miracle power of the living Jesus of Nazareth.

" Wherefore didst thou doubt " ? It is this mischievous doubt that is the bane of every religion. Men either will not or cannot, but certainly do not, believe. When we reflect that if a man has but faith as a grain of mustard seed, " which is least of all seeds," nothing is impossible to him, we become alarmed concerning the existence of faith altogether.

Peter's answer is not recorded. Possibly he did not make any. We seem to be at liberty either to think the wind ceased of its own accord, or was rebuked as in a preceding case.

It seems probable other persons were in this ship besides the disciples ; and they that were in it were so impressed with what Jesus had done, that they worshipped him and declared him to be the Son of God. It thus appears that mighty works were not always ineffective ; that they had sometimes a temporary, if not a permanent influence.

In a more detailed account of this lake-crossing furnished in the next Gospel we are startled to find the portion relating to Peter entirely absent.

After this ship had borne its precious freight to shore, they, that is Jesus and his disciples, came into the land of Gennesaret.

33 ¶ And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

35 And when the men

On hearing of Jesus' arrival amongst them,

of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased:

36 And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

the men of "that place" sent out and gathered the diseased folks from all around, and brought them to Jesus. Unlike many others, the men of that place seem to have been very humble-minded, and only begged that these sick folks might touch the hem of Jesus' garment. This was granted by Jesus, and "as many as touched" were made "perfectly" whole.

It is not clear whether the whole of this sick gathering touched Jesus' clothing or some only; and it is difficult to understand why Jesus should sanction this peculiar mode of transmitting health to a collection of sick persons. The incident of the woman who crept up to touch his coat is pleasing, natural, and effective. For a multitude to go through this ceremony is very puerile and fantastic.

And here, Reader, we cannot help remarking, that agreeable as miracles of healing are, we feel to be getting decidedly overdone with them. This land of Gennesaret was a comparatively small district in which Capernaum and other places where Jesus had already wrought endless mighty works were situated; places where Jesus had gone about healing all manner of sickness and disease on the most extensive scale. The unnatural number of sick folk in these districts is beginning to look itself very like a miracle; and their cure is becoming undeniably wearisome.

The miraculous, especially when of a general and wholesale character, becomes stale very quickly. The non-natural loses our interest after a time very rapidly. In any miraculous record the supernatural parts begin to flag and then pall upon us, whilst the natural portions retain all their interest.

It seems natural to suppose that after all this, these people of Gennesaret, and especially the restored sick ones, would become vigorous proclaimers of the new evangel. Alas! like all the subjects of Jesus' wonders they disappear, they vanish. One would have thought these five thousand fed ones, and this array of restored sick, would have preached Jesus with their latest breath, and instilled his name and the great things he had done into their children and their children's children. We seek in vain for so much as a trace of these things.

MATTHEW XV.

As the occurrence now related took place apparently in the land

CHAPTER XV.

3 *Christ reproveth the scribes and Pharisees for transgressing God's commandments through their own traditions: 11 teacheth how that which goeth into the mouth doth not defile a man. 21 He healeth the daughter of the woman of Canaan, 30 and other great multitudes: 32 and with seven loaves and a few little fishes feedeth four thousand men, beside women and children*

1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

of Gennesaret, Capernaum is usually taken to have been the scene of it.

Unhappy Capernaum! It is difficult to think why Jesus should constantly revisit that doomed place. The appalling woes he had denounced against it must surely have rendered it painful ground to him. And the citizens of Capernaum could hardly have welcomed Jesus' reappearances amongst them if they had heard of his declaration, "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." But probably they had not heard of it.

Jesus was now waited upon by some scribes and Pharisees who were of Jerusalem, by which we may understand men who were, or thought themselves, a degree or two more pious and accomplished than their provincial compeers. For the usual metropolitan pride found in the residents of every capital was greatly emphasized in the case of the dwellers in the city of the great king.

The dwellers in Jerusalem however illustrated their supposed greater wisdom as little as dwellers in capitals have usually done. The residents in a metropolis possess great advantages; and it is only just to own that they show the fruits of those advantages in a greater culture, refinement, and grace than are ordinarily found in their countrymen generally. But a capital city is a very artificial community, and invariably produces perversities and unwholesomenesses of a well-marked kind. It would have fared ill with many nations if the country had not often been wiser than the capital.

These scribes and Pharisees accost Jesus touching what they evidently thought a very grave matter; no

2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

less a matter than to know why Jesus' disciples so far outraged the then proprieties as to eat bread without washing their hands!

The sight of this scandal evidently oppressed the consciences of these godly men, and they come to Jesus to

have the matter fathomed. So weighty an affair could not be permitted to remain unexplained; and thus for the enlightenment of all ages and all mankind we are favoured with the decision of our Creator on this momentous question.

Following what may be, without exaggeration, termed an habitual custom of his, Jesus replied to the question of these scribes and Pharisees by asking them another. "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"

3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

According to Jesus both the commandments he here quotes are from God. We are sorry to learn this. The first is a most excellent injunction; the second is one of those many Mosaic regulations which are best ignored. It is most sorrowful to think that parents are to be found who neglect and even maltreat their children. To such parents no honour whatever is due; and though none but fools waste their breath in cursing anything or anybody, resentment and detestation of parental misconduct are entirely justified if amendment has not deserved forgiveness.

4 For God commanded saying, Honour thy father and mother: and He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

These two commandments Jesus charges his interviewers with having made of none effect by their traditions. In support of this charge Jesus mentions some obscure trivialities bearing upon the behaviour of children to parents which are quite unintelligible as here given, and destitute of the smallest interest; but which he alleges these scribes and Pharisees inculcate. We have, of course, no reply from these scribes and

5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, *It is a gift*, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

6 And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

Pharisees, except the statement that they were offended. And we do not know whether it was the ascription to them of the stultification of Mosaic commands mentioned by Jesus, or his usual salutation, "Ye hypocrites," which offended them. It must be owned this latter would give offence to other men not less than to scribes and Pharisees. Even Christians upon whom this appellation has been very plentifully bestowed, and with a full average measure of justice, would take offence at it.

The disfiguring and mystifying, and even the nullifying and inverting effect traditions may have upon an original, has seldom

been more strikingly displayed than in the case of Christianity itself. What the chief Christian Church has to answer for under this head Protestant Christians have set forth at great length. But the departures from and addenda to scriptural Christianity these latter themselves make are in their way quite as astonishing.

The *tu quoque* argument was often used by Jesus. As a mere rejoinder it may at times be just and effective; but at all times for any useful or permanent purpose it is entirely valueless.

Little did these scribes and Pharisees think that Esaias, whose writings many of these men knew by heart, was speaking of them when he penned the passage here given. And were it not for the exegesis of the passage here furnished by Jesus, we may be sure that neither these scribes and Pharisees, nor any one else, would ever have discovered the seer's real meaning.

"Ye hypocrites." The contentions between Jesus and the Pharisees form a very large proportion of the whole Gospel matter. They were conducted in what appears to us a very painful fashion. There is no approach to respect or courtesy; everything is said in a harsh and bitter way. When we refer to the last Gospel we find that these altercations sometimes reached a most extreme pitch.

We are constrained, Reader, to say that in Jesus' mode of dealing with his opponents there is not one iota of those qualities or that frame of mind to which the word "Christian" is now so often specially applied, but which are very imperfectly designated by that term; qualities which were known and practised long before Christianity existed, and to which the application of the word Christian or Christlike is a very partial compliment only.

Jesus makes no attempt whatever to exhibit the so-called Christian virtues. He makes no effort to convince, convert, or even soften his adversaries. He terms them vipers, hypocrites, children of the devil, and numerous like epithets: samples of the rudest forms of vituperation.

The Pharisees exhibit a precisely similar spirit. They term Jesus a blasphemer, declare him to be mad, and charge him with being possessed with a devil. Such was the style and such the amenities of these celebrated wrangles.

7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying,

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

When we call to mind the calmness, fairness, and sense of justice with which a certain illustrious Greek four centuries before the time of Jesus conducted his disputations, and the conciliation and tenderness he displayed even to those who compassed his death, we greatly misjudge if the example here shown by the prophet of Nazareth can be considered other than a lamentably retrograde one.

There is nothing mankind have learnt more slowly, but nothing they have learnt more surely, than that the most effective way to discover the truth in all controverted matters, and to secure its early triumph is to deal with opponents in a spirit of perfect fairness and perfect charity; and to give to them what we claim ourselves—just and honourable motives. All which is in no way whatever inconsistent with earnestness and strong conviction.

Vituperation is now seen to be not only a rude and ineffective, but also a most mistaken way of dealing with ideas of any kind—even the most erroneous ones.

That Jesus used it so largely simply shows us that he was not in advance of, was not even abreast of, the best standard that men had even then attained to. To call the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites was not the way to make them Christians; and we cannot feel surprise, however we may regret, that they paid Jesus back in his own coin.

This statement shows how little ground there is for the hope
 some kindly-natured and broad-minded men
 have given expression to, that the sincere but
 mistaken worship offered by the bulk of our
 fellow men under their varied false religions
 may in some way and measure avail them as if it had been offered
 under the true one. For though deluded, their intentions and
 meanings and objects are clearly the same as in the case of true
 believers. But sincere belief in a false religion avails nothing as is
 abundantly shown in these scriptures, and in the scriptures of other
 systems also. We are to find the true religion or pay the penalty.
 Conscientious misbelief or conscientious unbelief will not be
 acknowledged.

All the false religions are obviously the commandments of men. And though many of these commandments of men, especially in such matters as obvious moral duties and external ceremonies, resemble, and not seldom are identical with, the commandments of heaven, observance of them, as we here see, is vain. There is

9 But in vain they do
 worship me, teaching
 for doctrines the com-
 mandments of men.

much reason to fear that compliance by true believers with the many commandments of Jehovah that were not moral, will prove more effectual than compliance with many excellent commands not given by him, on the part of non-believers.

Having finished with these Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus beckoned the "multitude," and quite startles us by enjoining them to "Hear, and understand." Only two chapters ago we were reflecting upon his declared method of teaching the people so that though hearing they might not understand.

Our curiosity is here aroused, only to be gratified in a very humble way; all Jesus had to say to the multitude was the very modest bit of wisdom laid before us in the next verse.

Jesus was not always of this opinion. In the code which he dictated to Moses he prohibited the Jews from eating a number of "unclean" meats; amongst which, singularly enough, were some very excellent articles of diet.

10 ¶ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

A little further on we have an elucidation of this statement for the private benefit of the disciples, who did not fully understand it. Whether the multitude succeeded in grasping its meaning without further expounding, who shall say? It is not unreasonable to think that in a multitude there would be some few equal to the task.

The disciples had evidently got to know what the Pharisees thought of Jesus' answer to them. They therefore ask Jesus if he is aware that his answer had given offence to those worthies. "Knowest thou?" The all-knowledge of Jesus is one of those many assumptions of later dogmatic theology that fit much we find in these Gospels so badly. A little further on we shall find Jesus himself asking information from these disciples.

Throughout all these Gospels Jesus exhibits an all but insuperable objection to giving what would now be termed a direct reply to any inquiry put to him. The plain words, Yes and No, he did not use. They are scarcely to be met with in these four Gospels.

By way of answer to the disciples' inquiry, Jesus makes an assertion whose bearing on the point raised is not perceptible. It has therefore to be considered

11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

which my heavenly
Father hath not
planted, shall be rooted
up.

in its own inherent light, if so be we can
find it.

It is the great and deserved drawback of figurative expressions, that even if we can make sure of what they are intended to convey—which is often far from being the case—they give no indication—or oftener, perhaps, misleading ones—of the manner in which, or extent to which the idea they symbolize is to be applied.

Every plant that Jehovah hath not planted shall be rooted up, is an assertion capable of almost endless interpretations; especially as regards time and method of “rooting up.”

Some little time back we were dealing with some teaching of Jesus concerning wheat and tares, in which he expressly commanded that both should be allowed to grow together until harvest; and in which he forbade any attempt to root up the tares. He also laid down that the sower of the tares is the devil; and the reason why those bad plants were not to be rooted out was that the process might injure the wheat.

Here, however, Jesus assures us that every plant not planted by his Father “shall be rooted up.” It is true we can form no idea at what stage of growth this is to be effected. But even if these plants are allowed to ripen, it is perhaps some little consolation that they are to be uprooted some time or other.

We thus see that weeding is prohibited and is sanctioned. But it is palpable to every one that there is a third course much better than either of these. It is, not to allow tares to be sown; not to follow the devil and undo his work, which is really most humiliating, but to forbid that personage sowing any more of his noxious seeds at all.

An unique verse truly! What exquisite sympathy! What a lofty principle is here displayed to our gaze! “Let them alone.” Watch them tumble into the ditch.

14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

But Jesus seems to overlook the fact that there are two sets of blind ones whose fate is here so tenderly spoken of. There are the blind leaders, whose fall into the ditch may be a matter of indifference; it would almost seem of satisfaction. But then there are the far more numerous led ones, whose fall into the ditch cannot, it seems to us, be a matter of congratulation or even indifference to anyone,

Yes, "Let them alone." Ah well, Reader, it is no new principle after all; it has always been heaven's chief practice. On any religious supposition whatever, mankind have always consisted in the main of Blind led by the Blind; do so still. It is a picture in which our poor race cut a somewhat sorry figure, certainly; but not, to our thinking, so sorry as the figure cut by the celestial lookers-on, sightless and tumbling into the ditch though men be.

The many helping hands professedly held out to us from the skies have only led us into worse ditches and deeper mire. We have done greatly better since we decided to grope our own way as best we can.

It appears the disciples did not feel to thoroughly understand the statement which Jesus had called the multitude to hear and understand. Peter therefore answered and said to Jesus "Declare unto us this parable." How very wearisome, we may just remark, this phrase "answered and said" does become. It occurs no less than six times in this very chapter.

Well might Jesus ask this question. The obtuseness ascribed by our author to himself and his colleagues is certainly astonishing. The phrase here used by Jesus, "without understanding," is hardly too strong to apply to some of the misconceptions in matters of fact as well as of doctrine displayed by these disciples later on. When we think of the masterly perceptive powers exhibited by our author in deciphering ancient prophecies, obtuseness in his case seems doubly difficult to account for.

16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

How very imperfect and inaccurate a statement of the true facts of the case this assertion is, is evident to everyone. If all that goes in at the mouth were really cast out into the draught, life would come to a speedy end. It is the fact that of what goes in at the mouth a large portion remains and is assimilated and becomes part and parcel of our frames; the fact that the nature of what goes in at our mouths affects our health, our strength, our life, and our thought, that renders the subject of the wholesome and nutritive qualities of foods one of the most useful of studies and the preparation of food one of the most useful of arts.

How far the entrance into man's mouth of intoxicants and of narcotics defiles him, for example, is an old question we need not argue here. The great Prophet of Mecca decided the former question very peremptorily, and to this day banishes intoxicants from his two hundred and fifty millions of followers. And yet Christian abstainers have not a single word of honour for the great abstainer who did more for the cause than all other prophets put together. We never hear of Koran temperance, but much of Gospel temperance. This latter is apparently founded on the example of a prophet who took wine, and on one occasion made it; who was known as a "winebibber," in contradistinction to the ascetics, who all shunned it; whose many references to it are all more or less laudatory, and who never uttered a single word of disparagement concerning it; and who finally selected it for his own commemorative ceremonial, in the keeping of which thousands of casks of it are every year consumed by his followers.

Jesus as a patron of total abstinence seems amusing enough to outsiders. It is, however, but one of endless instances of the famous process of pious "adjustment." Unpleasant facts are really no obstacle to the play of pious fancy. Christian members of the Peace Society declare Jesus to be a great patron of their noble object. The fact that he expressly stated he did not come to send peace on earth; that he warned men not to think so; and that he came to send a sword, is a mere trifling objection. Do we not know that a little pious dialectics, properly applied, obviates this formidable looking difficulty to all except obstinate rationalists who are not worth taking notice of? Even Christian vegetarians assure us that the distribution of fish amongst the people by Jesus that we were considering in the last chapter, and find repeated in this, offers, when rightly looked at, no divine discouragement whatever to their amiable theory.

We greatly fear that the art of rightly looking at religious problems is not easily acquired; we are inclined to the predestinarian view that it is born in some men and in them only. That the use by Jesus of wine and meat means, when rightly looked at, that he intended his followers to abstain from both, is but a small example of the looking aright needed with some major theological propositions in order to arrive at sound views.

Though it is sad to notice how unmerciful to each other the

various claimants to clear theological vision are, the fact undeniably affords some little consolation to those of us who feel our possession of that faculty to be so miserably small.

It is not necessary to dwell upon these very just and obvious statements. How all bad actions arise from our bad passions moralists and psychologists show at much length; and upon the origin of the passions, and their effect upon character, much light has now been thrown.

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies;

The proper control and restraint of the passions Nature has implanted in us have

ever been the main practical problem in human conduct. On no subject are the cheering teachings of Evolution more cheering and hopeful than on this. A comparison of the foremost nations and communities of our time with their ancestors near and remote, and with types of manhood still existing on our globe, shows us what vast strides have been made in subduing and toning down the worst features of human nature. What a hopeful prospect is thus held out to us from the further cultivation of the better parts of our nature and the disuse and consequent atrophy of the worst!

"But to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." It feels to us lamentable that the demolition of

20 These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

such trumpety ideas as the one here dealt with should have occupied even a fraction of the time of our Creator during his short sojourn on our

planet amongst us. Regret passes into amazement as we think of the momentous questions then and yet crying aloud for light, but which during that sojourn received none. If mankind were not to receive light on things worthy of it we might have been spared illumination of the type and quality here given.

Leaving the land of Gennesaret, Jesus now made a journey northwards. He departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. What we are to understand by that phrase is a subject of diverse opinion amongst commentators; and it must be owned

21 ¶ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

to be an expression that leaves gospel-like scope for divergent views. Most commentators seem to think that Jesus did not leave the land of Israel, but simply approached the border. His early visit to Egypt, however, shows us that the supposed necessity of confining his personal and physical presence to the holy land is imaginary.

From Capernaum to the nearest border of Tyre and Sidon was some twenty miles. To the city of Tyre itself it was some eight or ten miles further.

What a pity it seems that Jesus did not go forward to the cities of Tyre and Sidon! We know from his own confession how fruitful his mighty works would have been there. But the people of those cities, responsive though they would have been to the new evangel, were left to perish. Salvation almost touched them, but still passed them by. The unworthy and doomed Capernaum seems to have quickly attracted Jesus back to it from wheresoever he may have gone.

A record of a visit of Jesus to Tyre—apart from the salvation of the people there—would have been most interesting. Subjects of a very different type to the great unwashed hands question, and what David did when he was an hungred, would certainly have been raised there, and have been discussed, we feel certain, in a widely different spirit from that shown in the present Gospel disputations. For it is only amongst those who worship the same God in different ways that religious differences are so very bitter.

A story is now recorded that is somewhat trying even to the

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

most robust admirers of the Prophet of Nazareth. It is an account of the ejection of a devil out of a girl. The miracle itself is indeed in this case quite a minor matter; it is the remarks made by Jesus that give this incident its value and its beauty. There is, however, an

undeniable fitness in the fact that observations of the lovely kind here ascribed to Jesus should be found associated with the noble art of exorcism then so much practised and so much esteemed.

A "woman of Canaan," who came out of the "same coasts," approached Jesus to tell him that her daughter was "grievously vexed with a devil," and crying for mercy. It thus appears that the reputation of Jesus as an exorcist—and let us hope as a doer of higher class works also—had reached these border lands.

What must have been the feeling of a mother as she looked into the face of her little girl and believed a devil to be in it, we in these times cannot make any attempt to realize. None of us are now willing to let our thoughts rest upon such loathsome notions sufficiently long to bring home to ourselves all such a belief must have carried with it. Two centuries ago, when the belief in

witchcraft was drawing to the end of its frightful career, some vivid accounts of the operation of that belief were written, from which we see that it could entirely dissolve not only all feelings of mercy and pity from one human being to another, but also the strongest and closest ties of natural love and affection. The belief of devils in children must have had even greater horrors about it than the belief in witchcraft possessed. But we will not dwell on the subject.

Jesus made no reply to the woman. She was not a Jewess. She had not Abraham to her father. According to our author she was a Canaanite; a descendant of one of those who must have been improperly spared from a memorable "Thus saith the Lord," enjoined by Jehovah in the days before he had become our heavenly Father who is now no respecter of persons.

The disciples, too, evidently wished to get rid of this Canaanite; and they besought Jesus to send her away. Yes, Reader, "Send her away." One would have thought that amongst this famous dozen there would have been one with some little pity in his nature, who might have complied with the woman's request on his own account; for they had all, as we remember, been endowed with devil-casting power. Our author, however, writes this "Send her away" without any sense of shame; just as he writes how he and his fellow-apostles took to their heels when Jesus was arrested.

This famous declaration has given commentators much trouble. None of the many awkward Scripture passages better illustrate the triumphant resources of the delightful science of Scripture exegesis. For after being duly exegeses, and then rightly looked at, this startling passage not only ceases to startle us, but we wonder how it was it so alarmed us when we first read it.

The true meaning of the statement "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" is, of course, not that Jesus' mission and sacrifice was for Jews only, but that his own personal itinerary was to be strictly confined to Israel. To preach the gospel to every creature was all right in his followers, but it had not to have the personal example of Jesus himself. Hence, though at this time he was within some eight miles of the city of Tyre, Jesus did not visit it and proclaim the gospel there, but returned

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

a distance of twenty miles to the melancholy village of Capernaum once more.

The allegation of sceptics that Jesus having failed in converting the Jews, offered, as a second thought, his gospel to the heathen, may, of course, be dismissed as an unworthy sneer at divine truth. It must, however, be admitted that the extension of the gospel to the heathen was mainly the doing of a certain converted Pharisee who had never seen Jesus, and who had all sorts of difficulty thrown in his way by those Apostles who had spent some years in the company of Jesus.

The cold behaviour and colder assertion of Jesus, and the "Send her away" of the Apostles, did not daunt this heathen woman. It is not difficult to see what nerved her to renewed effort and steeled her to contumely. It was the remembrance of the devil in that little girl of her's at home. What would not a modern mother suffer to get a devil out of her child?

Neither pity, supplication, nor even worship moved Jesus, and he gave the woman a third refusal. Unhappily that was not all. He accompanied this refusal with one of the most odious—but also one of the most ridiculous—sayings in existence. It divides the human race into Jews and dogs. We do not think this classification was one that would trouble anyone much even then; for the estimate of the Jews and their affairs by Gentiles generally was, it must be admitted, about as mean a one as it well could be.

As an expression of Jewish conceit merely, this saying is no longer worth consideration. It is only in his capacity of Second Person of the Trinity that this saying of Jesus now possesses any interest. So regarded, its very serious nature is evident. We leave, however, to those who may feel disposed, all further study of the subject, just remarking that here even the science of Scripture exegesis fails, and that commentators retire from this verse defeated, and covering their retreat, to use a military phrase, under whatever cannonade of religious verbiage they are able to get up.

It may, perhaps, not be out of place here to observe that a little further on we shall come to an incident in which Jesus speaks of heathen dogs in an altogether different tone to that here employed. He was speaking of a Roman coin which bore Cæsar's image; and in

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

so doing referred to those famous non-Israelitish dogs—the Romans, in an extremely civil manner; and recommended his countrymen to be very deferential to them also. Seeing that the Romans had conquered the Jews, and at the time used them somewhat harshly, Jesus' advice was not popular and was certainly not very patriotic. But its prudence was demonstrated not long afterwards; for later on injudicious incivility on the part of the Jews to these Roman dogs caused Jerusalem to be demolished and the children of the kingdom scattered abroad.

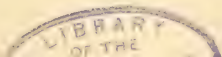
A sprinkling of the descendants of these children is to be found in most modern nations, and in all enlightened countries we have secured for these children, after much Christian opposition, equal privileges with our Gentile selves. In some Christian countries which are not very enlightened, the "children" are still badly treated and denied just rights; but it must in fairness be owned that the children themselves greatly conduce thereto by their ineradicable predilection for certain lucrative but not popular pursuits.

The children's bread is now freely cast to dogs of all kinds—the children themselves still, as ever, sulkily refusing in its altered form to eat it. We ought, we presume, to feel flattered that we Gentiles are now permitted to taste this celestial bread. It is, however, the alarming fact that this heavenly bread has long been declining in Gentile estimation; and the belief is becoming general amongst the best judges that our good, honest, earthly bread is in every way a far better article. In this estimate we have, Reader, to own that for our part we entirely concur.

The woman, however, was not to be cast aside. The remembrance of that devil in her home made her resolve to bear with any affronts if she could only obtain the magical exorcistic formula she was seeking. Hence she humbles herself even to the pitch of degradation here recorded. She accepts Jesus' sneer, but points out that even dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the masters' table.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

It is indeed melancholy to read that this grovelling servility achieved the success denied to worthier reasons. It was expressly "for this saying," according to the next Gospel, that Jesus yielded. It was not the thought of the devil in the poor girl; it was not the mother's agony as she thought of that frightful fact that moved Jesus, and led him to reconsider his repeated refusals to



interfere. It was the saying that dogs eat crumbs that prevailed. "Truth, Lord." Never was a more ignoble sentiment addressed by that noble word.

At last Jesus gave way, and gave instructions for the devil to leave the girl. Accordingly the devil did so ;

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

the girl, as the ludicrous expression here used gives it, being "made whole" that very hour. Here, of course, as with "cures" elsewhere, we have simply our author's assertion for the statement he makes. If the poor mother

believed the devil had left her child that was all that was needed.

After the strain naturally produced by the preceding dialogue, Christian commentators, on reaching this verse, burst out into fulsome praises, some of which are bestowed upon this woman and the remainder upon Jesus.

We can join in neither. Of this woman little need be said. What mothers have done and endured to get fancied cures for afflicted little ones, the pathetic history of superstition shows us abundantly. In our own country, mothers have been crushed to death to get an ailing child "touched" by the royal hand. The superstition this poor woman so believed in was one of the very worst that ever humbled and disgraced the human species. The history of devil-possession and of exorcism is one of the darkest chapters even in the dark records of credulity. Happily it was a belief that even then was tottering to its fall. All the practice and patronage of it by the Prophet of Nazareth could not save its downfall. So markedly was this the case, that though, as we see, the three first Gospels are brimful of devilism, it was thought better to entirely omit the subject from the fourth, which was not written until some time afterwards, though written, as we know, by that favourite disciple who had witnessed the endless exorcisms of the Master, and had himself received and freely exercised the casting-out endowment. In the dark ages of early Christian history devilism was, however, from time to time spasmodically revived.

Concerning Jesus' own attitude in this story little need be added. We have already dwelt upon the captivating thoughts he gave expression to during the course of it. It is true he at last gave way and evicted the devil. But he did it grudgingly ; not from any high principle, nor from any sympathy, but as a yielding to mere importunity only. He thus very practically illustrated that

parable of the unjust judge, in which so extraordinary an analogy between that official and his heavenly Father is laid before us. He also showed us that the heathen are sometimes heard as a result of their much speaking.

Jesus evidently did not stay long in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

He quickly returned to that lake whose shores had now become well-trodden ground: to that district which had clearly so great an attraction for him; the reasons for which we cannot now discover.

On arriving back in his own country—a distance of some twenty miles—Jesus, as if to emphasize the preceding incident, is represented as performing miracles broadcast, without question and without demur. Such was the difference between Jews and—well, folks who were not Jews; for we think the divine epithet used by Jesus to denote the latter is best left alone in its glory.

The remainder of this chapter is simply a portion of the last

30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them *those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:*

31 Inasmuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

32 ¶ Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?

34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

chapter over again; if not the same incidents, precisely of the same kind. The extraordinary prevalence of sickness, blindness, dumbness, and other ailments around Lake Tiberias still continues; from which we see that the known percentages of such cases in a modern community offer little or no criterion as to the state of things in Galilee eighteen centuries ago. Nor do the achievements of Jesus seem to make any headway against, or impression upon, this surprising stream of unfortunates. They seem as numerous as when Jesus first went about all Galilee healing all manner of sickness and disease of the people at the beginning of his public appearance.

There is no need to say much of this occurrence. Following so closely upon the almost identical achievement narrated in the last chapter it feels rather flat. The difficulty raised by the disciples about obtaining bread in a wilderness, feels very artificial when we think of how very recently they had seen that difficulty solved.

36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

37 And they did all eat, and were filled : and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets full.

38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

If mathematical considerations are at all applicable to the miraculous, it is obvious that to feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes and to have twelve basketfuls left, is a greater achievement in every particular than to feed four thousand with seven loaves, a few fishes, and only have seven basketfuls left. The applicability of mathematics to miracles seems very uncertain. To make two and two equal six, seems a greater thing than to make them equal five; but we cannot be sure that it really is so.

MATTHEW. XVI.

THE representatives of the two chief schools of thought amongst the Jews now come to Jesus to ask him plainly to show them a sign from heaven; in other words, a proof of his credentials.

CHAPTER XVI.
1 *The Pharisees require a sign.* 6 *Jesus warneth his disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* 13 *The people's opinion of Christ,* 16 *and Peter's confession of him.* 21 *Jesus foresheweth his death,* 23 *reproving Peter for dissuading him from it;* 24 *and admonisheth those that will follow him, to bear the cross.*

1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees come, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

This request, like all others, is absurdly termed a "tempting" of Jesus. It was neither more nor less than a most proper, sensible, and perfectly legitimate request in every possible sense. Let us for the time, Reader, place ourselves in the position of these same Pharisees and Sadducees, and try to realize to ourselves what under such circumstances it would have felt to us a manifest duty to do.

There was obviously nothing in Jesus, personally or physically, to distinguish him from other human beings. And yet this apparently and outwardly human being was preferring claims of the most unprecedented kind; claims, too, of the most undefined character.

Here was a person called or known by a confusing multiplicity of titles; Prophet of Nazareth, Son of Man, Son of God, Son of David. The main fact that he was the Christ was, however, kept strictly secret; for we shall find in this very chapter Jesus forbidding his disciples to disclose the fact that he was the Christ to "any man."

Nor was this all. This ostensible fellow-countryman of their

own was claiming in his own right to effect the most startling and fundamental changes in the existing Jewish faith; including—if the Trinitarian version of his sayings be correct—a declaration that he himself was no less than the Deity humanly personified. A declaration that would shock pious Jews beyond all measure; and in a way we can now only faintly realize.

No wonder, then, that the Scribes and Pharisees again and again came to Jesus for information. Their reception was always alike; they were saluted as vipers and hypocrites, and went away, so far as we can see, just as wise as they came. Here the Pharisees were accompanied by Sadducees. The Sadducees may be termed the sceptics of their age. They believed in the existence of Jehovah and acknowledged the books of Moses. But finding no Biblical warrant for a life after death, they denied that doctrine; they also denied many other doctrines current more or less amongst the Jews, and they rejected traditions. They may be best described as Jewish rationalists.

These Sadducees and Pharisees come, therefore, to ask Jesus for a sign “from heaven” whereby they might know and be assured that the extraordinary claims and allegations Jesus was putting forth on his own account were authentic and well-founded. The appearance of religious pretenders was no uncommon event with the Jews, any more than it was with other peoples. So well, indeed, did Jesus himself know this that again and again he warns men—even his own disciples—against false Christs and false prophets, who show their great signs and wonders. We are at an absolute loss to conceive how, in the case of a true prophet or true Christ, the greatest possible caution and misgiving on the part of men could seem otherwise than most reasonable and commendable. That ready faith religious founders so thoughtlessly praise in their own case is clearly the cause of those huge false systems that have so deluded the bulk of our race.

By way of answer to their request, these Sadducees and Pharisees are told they are hypocrites; some trivial remarks about the weather are made to them; the asking for a sign is declared to be the act of an adulterous and wicked generation; and they are told that no sign shall be given them but the “sign of the Prophet Jonas”; after which, Jesus walked away from them.

Would it not, Reader, be as well if we try to put ourselves

for a short time in the place of these Sadducees and Pharisees, and bring home to ourselves what they must have thought and said to each other after Jesus left them? What a group, had they then existed, of our own countrymen, so addressed, would have said not only after, but even before, Jesus went away, we have a very decided conviction about.

What Jesus was in the habit of afterwards saying of those who interviewed him we know well. Unhappily we have no narrative from the other side. With regard to these Gospels we are in the always misleading and unsatisfactory position of having one side of the case only. This is true, indeed, of the accounts of all religious founders. All religions rise in obscurity. Believers give their versions; non-believers never, at that stage, think it worth while doing so. Hence, apart from the myths that gather around the great creed-founders afterwards, the early accounts of them are all from the pens of believers who often make the most palpable and awkward efforts to magnify their hero. An account of each religious founder by those who knew him but did not believe him, which in every case meant all but a very few of those who enjoyed the inestimable privilege—would almost certainly have left the world religionless.

In the first place, Jesus assures these men they can infer

2 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.*

3 And in the morning, *It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

fair or foul weather from looking at the sky. Remembering how very partially true this was; how weather forecasts are only moderately reliable in general, and how not seldom they are entirely misleading, a more unfortunate simile to liken anything of the nature of an absolute and certain truth unto, such as a religion claims to be, could not be imagined.

“Ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” Is this reasonable? Is it just? Can we discern the signs of our own times? If so, what are they? We may, it is true, have our own views thereupon; but how widely different they are even amongst our best and wisest thinkers we all know.

And what were the signs of the times these men should have discerned? A less striking and more uninteresting period of history than the time in question it would not be easy to find.

The next subject given to these men to ponder upon was the statement that they were hypocrites. There is no need to dwell on this; it is simply the usual designation of his opponents by Jesus. It was not likely to make the signs of the times much clearer to these men; so far, at least, as Christianity was one of those signs.

Some other Pharisees had already been favoured with this declaration on making a like request elsewhere. When we call to mind how Jesus had so often obliged the forefathers of these very men by sending fire from heaven, turning rods into serpents, and other most extraordinary "signs" of an expressly demonstrative and corroborative kind, it would have been interesting to know why what he once considered so suitable and becoming, Jesus now regarded with such aversion.

4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

It is no disrespect to Jesus to say that these men knew the little book of Jonah quite as well as he himself did. We mean, of course, in its outward and natural sense only; for that they had not a glimmer or suspicion of its inner and deeper meaning is evident; nor do we see how it is possible they could have had. Give now to any human being the book of Jonah, with the fact that the prophet spent three days and three nights in a whale's belly, how he is to derive therefrom that Jesus of Nazareth was to spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth we do not know; nor does Jesus explain.

Such was the answer returned by Jesus to the most important question ever put to him. Answers like these should not, in justice, be forgotten when we come to the trial and condemnation of Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees, and the chief-priests of the Jewish faith. Not that they offer any sufficient justification of that condemnation. The aspersion of these men as vipers and hypocrites, and the propagation by Jesus of what they regarded as blasphemy, were no valid pleas for his death, though they may have then been thought so, and though Christians have themselves since sufficiently acted upon similar notions.

What we ought not to forget, if we wish' to be just, is—what the opponents of Jesus did not forget—that the attitude of a meek, uncomplaining, saintly victim with which he in the main met his trial and condemnation, was not the attitude Jesus had always or

even generally assumed to his enemies. No, Reader! It was not exactly the character by which those enemies knew him best.

Were a genuine messenger from heaven to appear amongst us to-day, it would clearly be our right, nay, even our bounden duty, to submit his mission to the strictest and most searching test; and to refuse our belief if not satisfied of the perfect authenticity of his claims.

Theologians profess that the miracles of Jesus were ample signs of what these men sought to know. Such a contention is a mere palpable *petitio* of the whole question regarding the objective reality of the miracles ascribed to Jesus. And it is surely significant that Jesus here makes no appeal to these miracles as signs; though, if what was recorded in the last chapter were true, these Sadducees and Pharisees were literally surrounded with the living witnesses and living subjects of these miracles. Jesus sent tidings of his miracles to the imprisoned Baptist to reassure his wavering faith. It is surely not a little singular Jesus does not name and appeal to his miracles to assure these Sadducees and Pharisees, though they were encompassed with endless cases thereof on every side.

On the arrival of the disciples at "the other side" it was discovered that they "had forgotten to take bread." It thus appears that the company were accustomed to take about with them the needful supply of food. Money was also taken, as appears from the bag carried by Judas. The exercise and non-exercise of miracle-power by all the many recorded possessors of it offer a problem to which it is vain to apply any of the canons of human reasoning.

Our author now favours us with a paragraph explanatory of a certain word used by Jesus, which seems to have puzzled himself and the other disciples also. What a tedious business this continual use of figurative expressions, to be constantly followed by explanations, does become!

"How is it that ye do not understand?" Every reader of this Gospel must have already asked himself this question. The continued dullness of these disciples becomes quite irritating, and the patience of a reader greatly

5 And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

6 ¶ Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have taken no bread.

8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

9 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five

thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

10 Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

12 Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

tried by having to read Jesus' explanations of his simplest utterances.

Annoyance passes into a kind of indignant astonishment when we remember that amongst the men thus constantly pictured as dullards was the writer of the fourth Gospel—a work abounding and delighting in fine-drawn distinctions and in subtle disquisitions—and of that immense work that brings the Christian Scriptures to a close; that another was Peter, two of whose letters are now in our

possession and disclose, not indeed any brilliance of any kind, but an ordinary normal intellect; that another was James, the writer of a letter which, though, singularly enough, almost devoid of references to his relative and master, contains much good sense of a homely and practical kind; and that another was our author himself—who, whatever we may think of him as a historian, possessed piercing insight into prophecy and its meaning.

Of course, according to theologians the choice by Jesus of these particular men, not excepting even the twelfth, displayed profound wisdom. Far be it from us to traverse such a proposition. There can be no sin, however, in lamenting that these twelve were not in some respects of a higher type. They were evidently all of the same rank in life; all drawn from one section of society; and all from practically the same locality. This want of variety was much aggravated by the presence of so many brothers in the twelve; two pairs certainly, and almost certainly three, with apparently other inter-relationships also. The narrow, restricted look thus given to the twelve is not pleasant in its higher aspects; how such a very contracted selection would tend to intensify prejudices and conduce to narrownesses of all kinds is evident. All the twelve were of course Jews. A faithful Gentile dog would, on one occasion, at any rate, not have disgraced the company. It may just be observed that the entire Gospel *personnel*, apart from its exclusively Jewish character, has a very cramped, blood-relationship appearance about it.

It seems astonishing our author should have deemed this long paragraph worth recording.

Jesus now made a journey of some thirty miles to the city

13 ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

of Cæsarea Philippi, or at any rate to its coasts; and whilst he and his disciples were in these coasts there took place an incident which our author proceeds to record, of which it is no exaggeration to say that it is one of the most extraordinary and least pleasing in all these Gospels. This incident is brought about by Jesus asking for information. He wishes to know what men say about him. Hence he asks his disciples the question, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"

A very natural question, Reader; an inevitable point of curiosity with all men. Men may hold as lofty notions of themselves as they like, and may profess as great an indifference to other men's views as they choose, still the estimate of ourselves made by those around us interests us; and, in all but very rare cases, greatly influences us.

The reply made by the disciples to Jesus' inquiry is an extremely curious one. It is obvious these disciples would often hear opinions expressed about Jesus that would never reach the Master's own ears. They give four theories or conjectures which they had heard "men say" about him. Some said he was John the Baptist; some Elias; some Jeremiah; and some, "one of the prophets."

14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

This reply was not at all flattering; and cannot possibly have been agreeable to Jesus. The Second person of the Trinity to be taken or mistaken for a dead prophet come to life again!

Why the people should all consider Jesus a dead prophet come back again, rather than a new one, is very singular. It seems to show that prophets had not come much latterly; and that it was easier for the popular imagination to picture the revival of an old prophet than to conceive the coming of a quite new one. A fact not only possessing much significance, but possessing also much real humour.

Probably these four theories were only some amongst many the disciples had heard. We have already in this Gospel seen Jesus declared to be the son of David, and also declared to be the Son of God and worshipped as such by the passengers who crossed the lake in his company. We may also remember that more than thirty years back, before these disciples knew him, Jesus had been recognized as King of the Jews by the Magi; for it is not easy to

forget the sorrowful sequel that untimely and purposeless recognition entailed; and that Herod discovered that Christ had been born in Bethlehem. On the other hand, we know the painful theory thrown out by the Pharisees, and the scarcely less painful one held, temporarily at least, by Jesus' own friends and relatives.

Upon the reply to his question given by his disciples Jesus makes no remarks; none at least are given. ^{15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?} He proceeds to ask these disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" A point-blank question which assuredly has a very strange appearance with it. Had these disciples never voluntarily declared to Jesus whom they thought he was? Had they been with Jesus all this time and never declared what they thought of him; and had he never made known to them his true character? What a strained, reserved companionship it must hitherto have been.

To this momentous inquiry of Jesus Simon Peter made answer; and apparently, from what Jesus states, in his own individual capacity only, not as speaking for the rest. He declares Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. A reply which greatly pleased Jesus, and which evidently greatly moved him also; for in his rejoinder to Peter's answer, he proceeds to bestow upon Peter personally, honours, promises, and powers which the extravagances of the world's religions will be searched in vain to equal.

First of all Jesus blesses Peter; and then declares that the fact Peter had given utterance to had not been revealed to him by flesh and blood, but had been made known to him directly from Jehovah. ^{17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.}

Two statements were contained in Peter's answer. The first was that Jesus was the Christ; the second that he was the Son of God. The latter, and far the more important of these two statements, could not be regarded as any ~~new~~ assertion. Jehovah had himself declared out of the clouds at the baptism that Jesus was his Son. The people in the ship which Jesus joined in mid-lake had declared him to be the Son of God, and worshipped him accordingly. Even the devils he had exorcised had testified—if such can be regarded as authentic corroboration—to the same fact; how they had got to know it seems a very curious point. It need scarcely be added that Jesus'

mother, her husband, and many others, had been aware of the fact more than thirty years previous to this time.

It must then have been the first part of Peter's declaration, "Thou art the Christ," which Jesus meant that not flesh and blood, but "my Father which is in heaven," had "revealed unto thee." We are told, however, in the fourth Gospel that it was from his own brother Andrew that Peter first learnt this fact. In the account there given of the first meeting of these two brothers with Jesus, we read that "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, we have found the Messias, which is being interpreted the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone." It thus appears that it was from flesh and blood, his own brother, that Peter first learnt that Jesus was the Christ; and that Andrew and he, and doubtless the others also had known Jesus' Christship all along. Dwelling upon the inconsistencies and contradictions of these Gospels is but profitless work, so we proceed to the next part of Jesus' reply to Peter's declaration.

"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church."

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The well-known play upon words contained in the original of this sentence has led to much controversy concerning the language spoken by Jesus and his disciples. For though Jesus, of course, knew all the languages then in existence, and also, we presume, all the modern languages which have since been evolved, he must in speaking to the people, even in parables, have used the tongue known to them; nor have we any evidence or hint that Jesus used more than one language. It is singular to reflect that this same language, whichever it may have been, appears to have been used by Jehovah in speaking from the clouds, by Jesus, his disciples, the Pharisees, and the people generally, and by those evicted devils whom Jesus sent, we—except in one case—do not know where.

In this sentence first appears in this Gospel a word that has figured greatly in history ever since—the term Church. It is probably the most controversial word in existence; and the varied definitions of it are well illustrated practically in the varied, motley, and diverse organizations which claim to be this Church, or to be

parts of it. It is vain to go back to the etymology of the Greek word *ecclesia* for light. Etymology may tell us where a word comes from, but cannot tell us what may become of it afterwards. In the strange history of words, original significations are often so departed from, that in some cases words have come eventually to connote pretty nearly the opposite of their prime meaning. And never had a word a stranger and more troubled history than this word church. Looking out upon the world of our own day, and asking ourselves the question, What or which is the Church Jesus here declares he will build upon this rock? we feel at once that it is a question of so controversial a kind as to necessitate the abandonment of any attempt to deal with it here. We may just observe that the chief Christian "Church," the organization which from its size, its age, and its world-wide and international character towers above all the other "churches," and which consistently condemns all other claimants to the title as false and schismatic, bases itself to no little degree upon this very passage we are now considering.

Whatever may have been meant by Jesus in using the word church, and what or which may be the true claimant to the designation in the world of our own day, he assures us that the institution was to be built upon the rock Peter, the son of Jona. A softer piece of rock could not easily have been chosen. And possibly this was the very reason of the choice, that human weakness might illustrate the divine sustaining strength. Any other ground for the selection it would not be easy to suggest.

For whatever other good qualities the elder son of Jona may have possessed, stability, or rock-likeness, could only be ascribed to him in irony. We shall find that when Jesus was arrested, Peter not only "forsook him and fled," but also afterwards returning to "see the end," unobserved as he supposed, was recognized and charged with being an associate; whereupon he with oaths and lies professed not even to know the man who had given him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Peter a rock! It does not seem a happy thing to designate a man by his weak points.

Against the Church thus based, Jesus declares that the gates of hell shall not prevail. The "gates of Hades" is a rare piece of obscurity; hence commentators give to it whatever meaning they think fit. Though Christianity has not existed in the world nearly so long as some other great existing creeds, the fact that it still exists, even in its limited and very rent and discordant

way, is declared by some theologians to be a singular fulfilment of this prophecy. In our judgment this "Church" and all other religious creeds have far more formidable and dangerous enemies than the "gates of Hades."

Not content with assuring Peter that he was to be the rock upon which the Church was to be built, Jesus proceeds to make a further announcement to him, which for its preposterous character leaves even the previous one far behind. "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The son of Jona is thus installed, Reader, as the absolute monarch of our planet; as the sovereign disposer of all earthly affairs. This member of our race is thus made permanent autocrat of our species, including men whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose. There is no limit to this power. Commentators may insert whatever qualifications they choose; Jesus made none.

With a characteristic mixture of metaphors, Jesus has thus made Peter the foundation-stone of his Church and the key holder of his kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is a phrase that defies definition; it was known to our author only, not being found in the other Gospels. The absolute control of all earthly things given to Peter in this verse is clear enough; but what or where the kingdom is of which the keys are here given into Peter's possession is far from clear. Some think it means the household of faith on earth; others the final and heavenly home of the faithful. The last mention of the kingdom of heaven by Jesus was that in which he stated that the least in that kingdom was greater than John the Baptist; and that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the "violent take it by force."

With a sort of anti-climax and a re-action noticeable as following most of his important declarations, Jesus proceeds to charge his disciples that they "tell no man" the fact which Peter had divulged that he, Jesus, was "Jesus the Christ." After reading of the making known to these twelve the rock whereon the church was to be built; and the making arrangements regarding the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the binding and loosing of

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

all earthly affairs, it certainly feels very tame to go on and read that the central fact of Jesus' mission was still to be a secret, and to be told to "no man."

We are now, Reader, getting far into the latter half of this Gospel history, and yet we meet with a strict injunction from Jesus to keep back and keep secret the main fact of his own life and mission.

The mixture of secrecy and publicity ascribed to Jesus in this Gospel is totally unintelligible. In his earlier miracles the subjects were enjoined to tell no man, even though the work had been done before a multitude. The disciples of John were enjoined to "go and tell" John of these miracles; and they are appealed to on certain other occasions. "What I tell you in darkness, speak ye in light; what ye hear in the ear, preach ye upon the house-tops." On the other hand, Jesus resorted to parables with the people, for what purpose we well remember. He began his public career by teaching and preaching in all Galilee—we do not know what, but certainly not Christianity. When he approached the coasts of the Gentiles, the coasts of his preaching, teaching, and healing, were approached also. Here the suppression of his Christship is strictly charged.

From such a picture, and such a line of conduct, we can perceive and gather no useful human lesson. The only faint approach to a lesson seems to be that it is necessary sometimes to temporize; not to blurt out unripe truths, however true and vital, and to let discretion temper heroism. In connection with this and other injunctions of secrecy, it is curious to read what Jesus stated to the high priest at his trial. "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple, and in secret have I said nothing." There is to our thinking something in this savouring somewhat of certain doctrines identified with that well-known section of Christians who specially bear the more personal name of the Prophet of Nazareth.

Jesus now, according to our author, began to apprise his disciples

of coming events; that he must go to Jerusalem, be killed, and be raised again the third day. As we meet a little further on with another reference to this important subject, we leave until then any consideration of it.

This seems to have been the first intimation

21 ¶ From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

made by Jesus to his disciples of his approaching fate, from which we see how very gradually Christianity was unfolded to its earliest adherents. We see, too, that the sign of Jonah offered to the Pharisees had not been grasped even by the disciples. The statement that "as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," had clearly conveyed no illumination to these disciples, however it may have fared with the Pharisees.

Hence Jesus began to "show unto his disciples" those coming events here named, and which evidently startled Peter, and led him to a warm deprecation thereof. What a commentary on those old "prophecies" now declared to plainly set forth these very events! It may safely be said that there was not then in all Palestine a single human being who had the smallest notion that the prophecies now alleged to be predictive of Jesus had the meaning now attributed to them.

The showing of these impending calamities, predicted or not, clearly surprised and excited Peter, and led him to an exclamation that would seem to most people simply an outburst of honest concern for his master, a generous deprecation which no warm-hearted man could help uttering on first hearing of threatened calamity to a friend and leader.

The fierce answer returned by Jesus to Peter's remark is very painful. Even Christian commentators seem astonished at this particular answer of their blessed Lord, and in writing of it give readers the impression that they are stifling and suppressing something in their minds, as they somehow do on many occasions.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

For ourselves we have become accustomed to the fierce answers returned by Jesus to his opponents, and to others who were not opponents even. The gentleness of Jesus has long been to us a dispersed myth. But we cannot help astonishment and regret at the harsh and unfeeling answer Jesus here makes to Peter's—a friend's—generous ejaculation.

"Get thee behind me, Satan." This is the very answer we may remember, Reader, that was given by Jesus to Satan personally when the two met on the top of an "exceeding high mountain."

On that occasion, seeing that Satan had tried to bribe Jesus with the kingdoms of our planet, and that there was reason to doubt whether Satan was in a position to make good the offer or not, the answer was not without appropriateness. But here the person termed Satan is the chief apostle, the rock on which the Church is built, the holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the binder and looser of all things whatsoever on our earth.

Simon—Peter—Satan! What are we to think of a person thus described? And what of the rock on which the Church is built being called the evil one? In vain do we fly to theologians; the soothing thoughts they offer us do little to abate our alarm. We presume Peter did as he was told. It is, perhaps, a consolation to find that he was received back into favour soon after this.

Jesus adds two other censures to this very fearful one: "Thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." The things "that be of men" are very varied, it must be owned; still some of them are very

24 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

excellent, and not, let us hope, in real anti-thesis to the things of God. Alas! Peter's subsequent backslidings show us that he did not savour some of the best things "that be of men."

These verses have been already considered in a former chapter in which they occurred.

This verse is one of several curious instances of the ethics of translation as displayed in this "authorized" version. The word termed "soul" in this verse is precisely the same as the one termed "life" in the last, and the object of this latter "rendering" is very palpable.

26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

To the question here asked by Jesus, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own life; or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" it may be answered that there are cases in which men ought to be, and are, prepared to sacrifice their lives if need be. What does a soldier gain who gives his life to achieve a victory? What does a woman gain who sacrifices her own life to save her child's? What does a lifeboat-man gain who loses his own life to rescue another's? What does a pitman gain who descends the burning shaft to rescue comrades, but himself returns no more? What are all these "profited" for

the loss of their lives? Obviously nothing. The only "profitable" sacrifice of life is religious martyrdom. That is enormously lucrative; and as sordid as it is profitable. That is the only "self-sacrifice" that personally pays. Happily human beings can and do rise to the height of real self-sacrifice, and that is when duty, not profit, is the animating force. Life is our best, our most precious, our prime possession; but happily there are things that men will lay down their lives to save or to secure, and in doing so ennoble and elevate our common humanity.

The natural interpretation of this statement is that the judgment day will be held on our own planet. If the resurrection of our bodies be a true article of faith, it is not easy to see how all our race can be present at once; nor is it easy to see where we have all been in waiting previous to the date of this event. When we remember that we have all to give an account of our words as well as our works, it is evident our globe will make many revolutions, diurnal and annual, before Jesus and his angels can have listened to and judged us all.

It is also evident from this "coming" of Jesus and his angels to adjudicate upon us how groundless is the notion that our departed ones are in heaven and in hell already.

All commentators agree that this is a "difficult" passage. Yes, Reader, it is a difficult passage. Not at all difficult in the sense that its meaning is difficult. The meaning is so clear that he who runs may read. This passage has a difficulty of a far worse and more serious kind than that. Jesus here makes a definite prediction. It has not been fulfilled. It has been decisively refuted.

The ways in which Christian apologists deal with this serious, indeed decisive, passage make melancholy reading. The best that can be said for such methods is, that as a rule they are manifestly efforts to appease the writer's own mind, not less than his reader's; and it is only too clear how little is accomplished towards the former object, however it may fare with the latter.

Some solutions of this difficult passage are brought forward for which it is impossible to profess any respect whatever. Explanations are proffered which it is entirely impossible to regard as honestly tendered. The mutually contradictory nature of these

27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

writhings and chicaneries makes them the most effectual answer to each other.

Jesus has not yet come with his angels to reward every man according to his works; but all the persons who stood there when he said this have long since tasted death. This prediction thus stands convicted of being palpably untrue.

Later on we shall find the imminence of the end of the world laid down by Jesus in greater detail. How entirely the early Christians lived under the influence of the idea we know well. In one of his letters, Peter, the Church-rock, heaven's key bearer, and binder and looser of all earthly things, who has figured so greatly in this chapter, assures us "But the end of all things is at hand." How thoroughly the same hallucination had taken hold of Paul's mind is everywhere visible; and in one of his letters he gives expression to it in a very ludicrous fashion.

Some business-like commentators turn this difficult passage to a useful account. They say it shows us this Gospel was written at an early date! Before, in short, one of the two things named by Jesus—that all then "standing here" had tasted death—had come to pass. This argument has a close resemblance to the famous one, that the inconsistencies in the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus prove the independence and non-collusion of the four writers of those accounts.

This difficult passage may be a proof that this Gospel was written in the first century, and the inconsistent accounts of the resurrection may be a proof that the writers were not in collusion. Unhappily, they are proofs also of two things far more important.

There are only two theories that can possibly—to use a once favourite word—obviate the difficulty now before us. One is to suppose that Jesus is incorrectly reported. The very diverse accounts of the same incident and saying given in these Gospels, and the strange way in which incidents are transposed and intermixed in the different accounts, show us plainly how impossible it is to regard any of these accounts as the verbatim utterances of Jesus, or the absolutely certain time or order of events. How dangerously like impiety the theory of literal inspiration is has often been pointed out. And yet the supposed literal accuracy of these Gospels has led Christians again and again to choose the greater rather than the lesser of two evils in many "difficulties."

The other theory is that death may possibly not have occurred to some of those then standing there. Two ancient Jews, as we know, were exceptions to the inexorable fate of humanity; they never saw the King of Terrors. There is no warrant for this theory in the present case, it must be owned; but then every attempt to obviate the difficulty of this passage is simply an effort to escape from its obvious meaning.

The true meaning of this passage, Reader, is only too clear. How Peter and our author who heard it understood it is plain enough. And there is, alas! but one way, and one way only, in which it can be accounted for. Theologians tell us that Jesus completely shared our human nature. We believe he did. In this, at any rate, non-believers and Christians may agree. And it is only too evident, Reader, that he shared that feature of our human nature we know so well, and we learnt so early, in the phrase, *Humanum est errare*.

MATTHEW XVII.

THE indications of time given in this Gospel are of a very singular kind; and do little towards enabling a reader to follow and connect events. This phrase "and after six days" is one of the very few connecting links of time relationship we meet with, and what a very minor one it feels to be. Times, seasons, years, and other natural things that fix a narrative and give it distinctness and life are curiously absent in these Gospels.

As with time, so with place. Things occur "in a desert place"; on a "high mountain"; "on the sea-shore"; "in the coasts of" or "region of" some place. This is eminently unsatisfactory. The event now recorded by our author took place on some definite mountain. Then why not name it? The mountain was still in its place when Matthew wrote his work; is there still. With all its faults the Old Testament is very much better in this respect than the New. The wonders of Sinai; the precise valley over which the Moon stood still, and the exact locality over which the Sun stayed his course for a whole day; and all the other wonders, are stated

CHAPTER XVII.

1 The transfiguration of Christ. 14 He healeth the lunatick, 22 foretelleth his own passion, and payeth tribute.

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart.

with admirable topographical clearness. Vagueness is not only confusing; it is mentally exhausting.

Of the transfiguration—as a supposed objective occurrence—we have little to say. It is a piece of pure supernaturalism, without, so far as we can discern, any discoverable purpose, and containing no lesson of any knowable kind.

2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

As here described, it appears as a mere display for the benefit of three spectators, and of them only; and the description of it is too slight to enable us to form much estimate of it as a spectacular effect. A person's face shining as the sun; his raiment becoming white as light; and a bright cloud overshadowing "them," are descriptive items of so meagre and so common-place a kind as to convey no distinct image. Hence the famous paintings of this event are so imaginative that the sketch given in these Gospels is not much adhered to even. The same may be said of many commentators' amplifications of it.

The most noticeable feature of this event is the re-appearance on earth of two ancient Jews, Moses and Elijah. We read that they talked with Jesus; but the conversation is not recorded. This is to be regretted; it also seems surprising, when we remember that in the case of a certain other memorable interview that took place between Jesus and a still more famous visitor on the top of a mountain that seems to have been still higher than the present one, we are in possession of the colloquy that took place.

3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Peter now made a rather wild suggestion; it was to make three tabernacles; one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. The third Gospel tells us that Peter and his two colleagues were "heavy with sleep," and that Peter did not know what he said. This of course quite explains the suggestion to make three tabernacles on the top of a high mountain. Jesus seems to have ignored the idea, and to have made no answer to it.

4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

It is not clear why these words from heaven should have terrified these disciples so much; for they were eminently agreeable ones. They do not seem to have alarmed the Baptist when they were spoken at Jesus' baptism.

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son,

in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

6 And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

verse generation; but what might his visit not have effected? It would almost appear that departed members of our race acquire that unconquerable aversion to publicity so noticeable with angels.

This "vision" Jesus forbade the three to disclose until after his

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

resurrection. Peter refers to it in his second letter—if that dubious document be his; the only Gospel event he does distinctly refer to. John omits it from his Gospel altogether. It is indeed curious to reflect that of the two

Gospels written by apostles, the transfiguration is described by the one who did not see it, and omitted by the one who did.

There is nothing in these Gospels more thoroughly disagreeable

10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

than the miserable mixing up of Elias and John the Baptist; another instance of which is again here presented. We know John's own emphatic denial of his being Elias. It is impossible to see what purpose is served by these repeated jumbings of the two.

"Elias truly shall first come and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already." It thus appears that Elias, that is, John the Baptist, has come and presumably "restored all things." Such things are best left as we find them—in the obscurity worthy of them.

"They knew him not." We may remember, however, that John was asked point blank. "Art thou Elias?" and that he replied, "I am not." What were people to do, and how were they to "know" after that?

"Have done unto him whatsoever they listed." Who are here meant? The general popularity of John is fully set forth in this Gospel. At the time of his death we read that when Herod would

have put him to death "he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." And we know that John's death was really due to a woman's revenge; and was brought about by that woman taking a mean advantage of Herod's vow given to her daughter for her dancing. Anything more unfair than to charge John's death upon the people generally, when they manifestly did not wish but deprecated the event, could not easily be imagined. Who were responsible for Jesus' own death will appear later on.

On rejoining the multitude, Jesus proceeded to perform an exorcism, which is related in this and the two following Gospels in considerable detail; the fourth, as we have already remarked, wisely eschews all these cases.

14 ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15 Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

A certain man came to Jesus to beseech him to cast a devil out of his boy; and describes to Jesus the pitiable proceedings the devil causes the boy to go through. In the next

Gospel we are told, however, that Jesus desired still more information, and asked the father, "How long" the boy had been in this sad plight. The omniscience of Jesus seems to have been somewhat intermittent; or otherwise these evangelists sometimes forgot themselves, or did not hold modern Trinitarian views. The same Gospel also tells us that the cause of all this mischief was "a deaf and dumb spirit," whatever that may mean; and in exorcising it Jesus addressed it as "Thou dumb and deaf spirit." Curiously enough this deaf spirit heard and obeyed.

Our author now makes a statement of a disquieting nature in many respects; but the narration of which does credit to his personal candour. It appears that the father had first brought his boy to the disciples; but neither our author nor his col-

16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

leagues could get this dumbdevil out. When we remember how Jesus had given these disciples unstinted powers in this and still more important matters, and had enjoined them to freely exercise the powers they had freely received, it is undeniably startling to hear that these powers failed. And it is all the more alarming to find that it was not the case with one apostle only, but with them all. Can these powers have sometimes failed them in that memorable expedition on which they were once sent out, but of which we never heard any more, and can discover no traces? But then do we not

read even of the master himself that "he could there do no mighty work"?

This exclamation of Jesus brings before us once more a fact with which we are only too familiar. The generation of men to which Jesus humanly belonged was a faithless and perverse one. And yet, Reader, if we understand the Christian scheme aright, this deplorable-looking fact was a necessary and even a fortunate one.

Had that generation been a faithful and a sensible one, it would not have crucified Jesus. And was it not for that very end and purpose that he came to our planet?

The faithlessness and perversity of that generation, so far from being lamentable, were in reality most fortunate. The blindness of the chief priests, Scribes, and Pharisees of that day, instead of being regrettable, was most opportune: for had they, like the priests and theologians of these days, been enlightened and far-seeing men, and like them perceived how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, the result would have been disastrous. Jesus would not have been put to death at all; and then what would have become of the world?

Jesus commanded the devil and the boy to be brought before him; rebuked the former, charged him to come out, and, according to the next Gospel, added the most agreeable and important additional injunction "enter into him no more." When we remember, according to Jesus' own vivid description, how apt ejected devils were to return, and bring a number of others with them, until in some cases a legion of them got inside a poor mortal, the "enter no more" seems to us the vital point of the matter.

Nothing is often easier than to temporarily compose a "lunatick"; hence the marvels we read of in other exorcists of the time; and hence, we presume, the castings out admitted by Jesus in the children of the Pharisees. The keeping out was the important thing: without that the casting out seems even perilous, remembering how much worse the last state of a victim might be than even the first. In the case of this child, therefore, we feel without any apprehension whatever of a relapse having ever taken place.

As this, we are happy to say, is the last recorded case of devil-

17 Then Jesus answered and said, O, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

casting, a word or two in taking leave of the hateful subject may not be out of place.

Here, Reader, in the external form of a Jewish carpenter, there was, by hypothesis, no less a being than the Creator of all things; hence the Creator in some way and form—we do not know what—of these same devils. Everywhere throughout the land he beholds these vile spirits entering into and taking possession of poor defenceless men, women, and even children. From time to time he casts out one or a number of these fiends from some poor creature; and admits that human beings cast them out also. But not a word do we find as to why Jesus permits these horrible proceedings; why he allows these atrocious things to be wrought even upon inoffensive children. Need we add, that any reason is not even conceivable?

Commentators approach and deal with the subject in a kind of hushed spirit that is not a little pathetic. Some suggest that devilism was a temporary phenomenon of Jesus' day to illustrate his own mastery of the infernals, but give no authority or ground for the idea. Some unprincipled ones say Jesus merely used compliance with a popular current delusion, though not really sharing it; they do this in manifest flouting of the text, and do not seem to mind the elevated view thus given of their blessed Lord. But most commentators, especially the more modern ones, speak in a bated breath of this subject; their regret that it figures so largely in divine scripture is painfully apparent; and they allude to it—what more can they do?—in such expressions as “difficult,” “mysterious,” “obscure,” and “inscrutable.”

Reader, these are not the words to use of this humiliating subject. One little word, which Christians would be the first to use if their own faith were not concerned, is the just and righteous one to apply to it. The little word scorn is the one that truly describes what men do feel and ought to feel as they think of this shameful and degrading superstition.

Our author does not disclose to us whether this was the first instance in which the miracle-power of himself and his companions had failed. Apart from an occasional piece of candour, he is extremely reticent, and, for an actor in the scenes he describes, is often inexplicably reserved.

However, he and his companions ask Jesus in private how it was

¹⁹ Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

their powers failed them on this occasion. Apart from the mortification of the failure itself, they would naturally feel uneasy, especially if this were the first case of the kind.

To this inquiry Jesus returned a very explicit answer—"Because

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

of your unbelief." This answer must surely have startled them; for it is of a kind to startle readers of it yet. For if these disciples, after receiving the colossal powers Jesus gave them; if, after freely exercising those marvellous gifts—though it must be owned our author does not give a single case of the exercise of

them by himself or his fellow-apostles, though surrounded by sick and afflicted ones continually, as we have seen—if after years of close companionship with our Creator in person, these disciples had not faith equal to a grain of mustard seed, we may well cease to wonder that that quality has been so extremely rare ever since. When we reflect upon what Jesus here proceeds to add; on the achievements which the possession of faith equal in amount to a grain of mustard seed would suffice to accomplish, we feel at a loss to know whether the obvious absence in all Christians of that amount of faith is to be lamented or otherwise.

The permanence and constancy of the laws of Nature are the prime foundation of all things; of all we know, of all we do, and of all we strive for. The ability of Christians, or of anyone else, to interfere with those laws, and to remove mountains by mere volition, in spite of occasional and undeniable advantages, would be a power of an altogether anarchical tendency. If, therefore, a Christian believer possessing a mustard seed quantity of faith should ever exist, it seems to us that Nature would lie at his feet, awaiting his pleasure; a state of things which we, as a fractional part of Nature, could not contemplate without much misgiving. On the whole, we think the absence from all believers of even the infinitesimal faith here named is a distinctly satisfactory fact.

To our surprise Jesus now assigns another reason why the disciples "could not cast him out." In the

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

preceding verse he distinctly ascribed the failure to the disciples' unbelief; here he

says, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

We are not sure we rightly gather who it was that had to do this praying and fasting. Was it the victim, or was it the exorcist?

Or would the prayers and fastings of friends suffice? One thing is clear; prayer and fasting had to be done by someone, otherwise this kind would not go out. However strong, therefore, the faith of the disciples might have been, it would have been of no avail unless the two indispensable preliminaries had first been complied with.

How bewildering these two verses are! The disciples' failure is first due to unbelief; to a grain of faith the removal of mountains is possible, indeed nothing is impossible; and yet "this kind" could not be got out without prayer and without fasting. Celestial lucidity is very puzzling, as all commentators find to their regret.

From this, too, it appears that the varied kinds of devils need varied methods of expulsion. The most curious query regarding devils seems to be whether they are a fixed number or are capable of being increased. It seems difficult to think that Heaven still creates or will ever create more; though they and their chief, if we understand rightly, came from that place originally. Can Satan add to his array by creation? This seems hardly likely, though the immeasurable power we have seen him possessed of, makes it not easy to say what he cannot do. If, as some think, departed sceptics and schismatics and false religionists swell the number of demons, it is increasing at a most appalling rate.

Once more Jesus made known to his disciples his approaching fate. He had already told them that he was going up to Jerusalem; and that there he would be killed, and then raised up again on the third day. Here he again repeats these forthcoming events in words as clear as words can possibly be. He "shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again." How fully the disciples understood these declarations, the statement that they were "exceeding sorry" shows us. It is, therefore, not a little astonishing to find the statement of John in his Gospel when speaking of the events of the resurrection and the conduct of the disciples concerning it, "For as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead." What are we to think of a statement like that from that very John who with his co-disciples had heard Jesus distinctly state over and over again that he was to be killed and raised again the third day?

22 ¶ And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:

23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceedingly sorry.

Even from a purely natural point of view, Jesus, having resolved to go to Jerusalem, could not fail to foresee his early death. With most martyrs persistence knowingly meant death. The predictions of his death by Jesus are therefore quite natural and credible.

The rising from the dead on the third day is, however, an addition of an entirely ultra-natural character; and John's own statement on the subject is the best commentary on the real character of that part of Jesus' prediction.

That the disciples should be exceeding sorry on hearing of Jesus' early death is very natural; for without thinking of Jesus of Nazareth as Christians think of him, it is quite intelligible, even to nonbelievers, that the approaching death of their leader should fill these disciples with keen sorrow.

But when to that melancholy announcement is added—according to this Gospel—the supplementary statement that three days after death Jesus would rise again and return to the disciples, the appropriateness of great sorrow becomes somewhat ambiguous. We think most men would regard the death of the dearest friend, on condition of his return from the dead three days afterwards, with a good deal of composure.

A humorous miracle is now recorded, a miracle as we read which the straitest of Christians will hardly begrudge

24 ¶ And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers.

26 Peter saith unto him, of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

us a smile. Once more Jesus and his disciples had got back to Capernaum, a place the constant return to which is only explicable by regarding it as the home of Peter and probably Andrew and a number of the other disciples; and which on that account Jesus continued to make his own adopted "city," though quite unworthy, as we know, of the honour. And though the irresponsiveness of Capernaum to the Prophet of Nazareth, and the consequent terrible fate Jesus had denounced against it, cannot but have rendered it a gloomy place to him, still it had its attractions. The once palsied man now restored and let us hope still sinless, and all the other subjects of his mighty works, would always surely be pleased to see Jesus, and he must also have been pleased to see them. Then there were the disciples who were—one

excepted—to Jesus, as we know, his “mother, and sisters, and brethren.” How little of Jesus’ company his mother, and his sisters, and his brethren according to the flesh enjoyed is painfully apparent in these Gospels.

A history of Taxes would be an interesting and even momentous record. The important part those imposts have played in the history of our race would not easily be exaggerated. The unpopularity of even just taxes; the extreme unpopularity of the other sort; and the singular way in which this unpopularity attaches itself to and fixes itself upon tax-gatherers personally would form an entertaining chapter of such a work. Of the latter point our author in his pre-apostolic days would have had no small experience.

The tax to which this authorized version gives the name of tribute-money was a Jewish tax of half-a-shekel—or one shilling and threepence of our money—levied upon every male Jew of over twenty for the support of the Jerusalem temple. The proceeds were expended in the purchase of animals, incense, vestments, utensils, and sundry articles required for the service of Jehovah in that temple.

It seems clear the collectors of this tax had called at Peter’s to receive his half-shekel; and that they were in some way led to inquire of Peter if Jesus did not also pay this impost. There is about this incident a strong indication that Jesus resided in Peter’s house; a view that has been very generally held. Whether this view be well grounded or not, the non-residence of Jesus with his own mother and sisters has always seemed to us one of the many points in which the example of Jesus is altogether unsuitable for human imitation generally. For no one could pretend that Capernaum, as the result plainly showed, had any special claim to be, or appropriateness for being, the headquarters of the new evangel.

To the inquiry put to him Peter returned the answer Yes; from which it is usually inferred that Jesus had paid the tax in previous years. Jesus was evidently in the house when Peter came in; and knowing—possibly hearing—what had taken place between Peter and the collectors, he anticipated Peter by asking him the question here given.

It is entirely impossible to assign any certain meaning to the two questions here put by Jesus and the answers given to them by Peter and himself. Commentators expound and paraphrase them

in a variety of ways according to their fancies; and whilst some try to extract a purely natural interpretation, others take them in a spiritual sense of some kind or other. It is obvious that the kings of the earth can only levy taxes on their own subjects, and upon foreigners resident in their dominions; and whatever meaning we may give to the terms "children" and "strangers," it is not easy to see the point raised by Jesus in these questions.

The evident conclusion was that Jesus considered the payment of this tax not personally binding upon Peter and himself, but still determined they should pay it upon another ground. "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them."

A contribution of half-a-shekel by Jesus towards the support of those Jewish sacrifices he, according to Christians, had come to abolish, and towards the maintenance of those chief priests who procured his death, is a curious subject to reflect upon, and needs a special kind of piety to appreciate.

"Notwithstanding, lest we offend them." Such, Reader, is the reason assigned by Jesus for compliance with the payment of this tax. He does not say the tax was a just one, and ought therefore to be paid. He does not expressly condemn it as an improper one. He simply gives the avoidance of "offending them" as the reason of his compliance and payment. A more unsatisfactory reason of an action could not be conceived. If this plea is good, it palpably applies to the most unjust and barefaced extortions equally with just and proper demands. Payment of a just tax is a simple duty, devoid of merit; to an unjust tax resistance, or at least protest is equally a duty. But to this modern principle the conduct of Jesus is an entire antithesis. The applause bestowed by the older commentators upon this action of Jesus, as showing the obedience due to *de facto* authorities, good or bad, explains how it was Christianity once lent such aid to civil and religious oppression. But this subject will be better dealt with when we consider Jesus' like answer concerning payment of tribute to Cæsar.

Having decided to pay the tax, it would seem that Peter and his master happened at the time to be without the requisite money to do so. Upon this circumstance, some zealous but not very discreet pietists have done much sentimental writing. The poverty, the penniless state of Jesus and his chief apostle is dilated upon in very doubtful taste. The vagaries of piety are certainly astonishing; those indulged in by some believers being very distasteful even to

other believers. For ourselves, we can only say that appeals to our feelings and our tears as we think of the privations of those who could extemporize food and wine at pleasure, and could even make a lake into a purse, are entirely thrown away.

Of the manner in which this odd shekel was obtained what can be said, Reader? Some commentators say it was dignified and lofty. Might they not have added contemptuous and disdainful? With sceptics this anecdote has been in all ages a recognized topic of merriment and derision. And we must confess that we cannot picture Peter's setting out to capture this remarkable fish, his laying hold of it, and extracting the coin, without finding all efforts to feel serious entirely dispersed. Whether this famous shekel had got into this celebrated fish's mouth by natural means, as some tamely argue; or was created and placed there purposely, as the bolder kind of believers contend, has been much discussed, but not, need we add, determined?

MATTHEW XVIII.

THE case now before us is a striking illustration of how variously, or otherwise how loosely, an occurrence is reported in the different Gospels. Here the disciples come to ask Jesus the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" According to the next Gospel the disciples had been disputing this question amongst themselves; and on their coming into the house where Jesus was, he asked the disciples what they had been disputing, whereupon they held their peace, not liking to say what it was they had been discussing. In the third Gospel, Jesus, without question on either side, divined their thought, and proceeded with his reply thereto.

CHAPTER XVIII.

1 *Christ warneth his disciples to be humble and harmless: 7 to avoid offences, and not to despise the little ones: 15 teacheth how we are to deal with our brethren, when they offend us: 21 and how oft to forgive them: 23 which he setteth forth by a parable of the king, that took account of his servants, 32 and punished him, who shewed no mercy to his fellow.*

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Accepting the version here given, that the disciples put this question to Jesus, it seems one singularly destitute of any useful or practical bearings, whichever of the many meanings of the elastic phrase "kingdom of heaven" we may assign to it. The infelicitous and bootless inquiries put to Jesus by his disciples

become really vexing when we think of the great questions they did not put, or which, if they did, are not recorded.

The way in which Jesus answered and dealt with this question has called forth unbounded admiration at the hands of believers. They pronounce it magnificent; some enthusiasts vote it an exhibition of clear divinity; something manifestly beyond mere humanity only.

Every thoughtful man must feel unfeignedly sorry when he cannot perceive the wonderful points, the astonishing sublimity, said by others to exist in any given thing; and every sensible man will always feel inclined to set down his non-appreciation to his own deficiency rather than to doubt the reality of the asserted qualities in question.

It is, however, the nature of strong religious belief to suffuse everything connected therewith with a peculiar halo, and to find even in the most commonplace things qualities and depths entirely undiscernible to non-possessors of the belief. This is a characteristic of religious beliefs of every kind and variety. The faithful of Islam discern beauties and treasures in even the tamest of the Prophet's trivialities. And so with the ardent believers of all other creeds. They all exhibit the same dreamy rapture; the same ascription of extraordinary qualities to very ordinary things; and the same allegations of deeper meanings in utterances not in the least difficult to fathom.

What then, was the reply of Jesus that has called forth these extraordinary declarations? Here it is. He "called a little child unto him and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

This is the action and the saying declared to be beyond human competence and to show forth clear celestial wisdom. Ah well, Reader, we have no option but to say that whilst the act and the saying are very pretty, pathetic, and effective, we can discern in the deed and the thought nothing more than a very natural and eminently human incident and utterance. To us this incident and

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

the eulogies of it are simply an illustration of a well-known fact—that it is not the contents of any given “holy writ” that prove the writ to be divine, but that it is the pre-supposition that the writ is divine which gives to its contents the glamour those contents possess in believers’ eyes.

To read some of the comments on this passage one would imagine that Jesus of Nazareth was the first who discovered and brought to light love of children; one would infer that the discovery of this emotion is one more of the precious things we are solely indebted to him for, and that before he came on earth men and women had never experienced and never expressed those exquisite feelings which children and childhood now inspire in us all.

“Become as little children.” What are the childish qualities then that we ought to possess? We can only think of one. Many indeed are the qualities in a child that please and charm us; its helplessness, its artlessness, its inexperience, and its unknown possibilities, for example. But there is only one childlike quality that a sensible man, once himself a child, would wish to retain, and that is innocence. It is the only childish characteristic to which it is possible to wish to revert.

If, as many maintain, and as seems more than probable, another well-known quality of childhood is here enjoined by Jesus—submissiveness to and unquestioning reception of what is inculcated—we do not hesitate to say that that is the very worst of childish qualities which it is possible for a full-grown man to retain.

Except ye be “converted” “ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Considered as addressed to these apostles, amongst them the holder of the keys of that kingdom, this sounds not a little curious. But possibly there were other people in the house at the time.

His subject, and the sight of the little bairn in front of him—

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

according to the next Gospel in his arms—evidently led Jesus to speak with much warmth; declaring that to receive one such little one in his name was to receive himself, which latter, as we know, is to receive Jehovah. On the other hand, to offend one of the little ones that “believe” in Jesus is an offence so great, that it were better for the offender “that

a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned

in the depth of the sea ;” an expression that somewhat misses its purpose of aggravation ; for if a person is to be drowned at all, a millstone greatly assists and happily speeds the result, and the depth of the sea is certainly the most eligible of all places to be drowned in.

“ Which believe in me.” The applicability of the term believe to children has been much discussed ; men’s recollections of their own child-time being apparently not altogether alike. A child so young, as with any tolerable appropriateness to be taken in a person’s arms, was, it must be owned, a remarkably young believer.

It is plain that children accept whatever is taught them ; and may be said to believe it in one of the strongest, many think the very strongest, forms or senses of the process of belief—that of unquestioning acceptance. We are not amongst those who think that this form of belief, vigorous as it is, is to be compared with the highest form—that which results from evidential demonstration, either in power, intensity, or security ; though there are some poor natures that seem capable of allowing the former species of belief to overrule the latter. The beliefs of our childhood are not easily shaken, but happily they can both be shaken and shaken off.

There cannot be any element of merit, or blame, or responsibility in the beliefs of children. The little ones are fortunate or unfortunate according as the things inculcated into their little minds are good or otherwise, true or untrue ; and all men may join in saying that a child who has instilled into him things that are not true and not good is an object of the deepest compassion and commiseration. When we reflect upon some of the things daily infused into children the world over, and especially upon the endless religious antagonisms daily imparted to them, we may well feel sad and also ashamed.

One of the most disagreeable assertions we have ever come

7 ¶ Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

across. “ For it must needs be that offences come.” We demur to this statement in its entirety. That there is no need of an offence of any kind in the wide world is one of our surest and happiest pieces of knowledge. How entirely superfluous and unnecessary all offences are is one of the main teachings of true morals.

Jesus does not condescend to say why offences “ must needs come.” Human thought is entirely thrown away on such an

amazing proposition. It is impossible to frame to ourselves a reason for this supposed necessity that is not beneath contempt even. Some of the Christian comments upon this are a deep disgrace to the writers of them, especially the common contention that offences and consequently offenders are necessary in order to try the faith of believers. If it be necessary to test the faith of believers, some less objectionable mode than this ought to be found. The product is not worth the cost.

But if offences are inevitable, we fail to see any comfort or satisfaction in the exclamation, "Woe unto the world because of offences." If such offences are bound to come, it is, of course, woful enough; but as long as they "must needs" come, it is best to regard them as stoically as possible. To single out "that man" by whom one of these necessary offences is brought about, the indispensable instrument of the alleged unavoidable, for denunciation is a proceeding in which it is difficult to say whether the ridiculous or the odious preponderates.

In our notes upon the sermon on the mount, where these lovely

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

verses with slight variations are also to be found, we have given our estimate of them. We like them as little on thinking them over again, as we did at first; if anything even less. The preferable character of one eye in heaven to two in hell is very humorous in its way.

So far as this latter verse may be considered an exhortation to honour, esteem, and worthily treat the little ones, most heartily do we say Amen thereto. But even Christian commentators candidly admit the impossibility of assigning any definite meaning to the latter portion of this verse.

It was a current Jewish notion, though ridiculed by the Sadducees, who did not believe in angels or spirits of any kind, that men had guardian angels; and it is not a little surprising to find Jesus sanctioning this "tradition." This notion of guardian angels has been much used in poetry; but like many similar poetic machineries, it is not easy to give it any prosaic or practical application.

Still, since Jesus confirms the idea, it is clear it must be well

founded. And yet how to interpret and realize the conception is the difficulty. That we determine our own actions and yet that our good genius or guardian angel watches over us, make a joint theory not easy to grasp. Our guardian angels do not keep the best of us out of mistakes that they must have seen we were going to make. Hence it is clear we cannot rely upon them.

For religious purposes, however, logical connection is not at all necessary. When a friend is sick, pious folks both pray for him and get him medicine. How often, alas! both fail. Still, in case of recovery it is only fair to own that both get the credit also.

It is much to be feared that this idea of guardian angels, like so many other pleasant illusions, has been shattered by that iconoclastic scientific spirit which has, however, more than amply atoned therefor by the many painful delusions it has dispersed.

Though it would seem that with heaven, as with ourselves, prevention must be better than cure, still to come and save the lost is a right worthy errand. It is true Jesus was not sent personally "but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; yet that object, though narrow, was a good one as far as it went. It is melancholy to think how little success attended the effort. No doubt, after the death of Jesus, when the children's bread was shared with us Gentiles, this mission to save the lost has had somewhat better results. Still, after eighteen centuries have elapsed, the proportion of lost to saved is better left un contemplated.

"How think ye?" Jesus so seldom appealed to human thought and human reason that it is refreshing to find them addressed even in the modest way here given. His inquiry from the disciples as to what men thought of him, certainly showed an interest and a curiosity regarding human opinion, which may possibly be thought rather flattering. But all religious founders are obliged to take note of what men think in that sense. What we more particularly mean is that Jesus seldom or never appeals to the human faculties in corroboration or confirmation of anything; seldom invites their action in any form, even in that of reflection; never directly enjoins their exercise in any way. Possibly some of his many appeals to the emotions may be regarded as partially addressed to the reason; but they are so very partially, if at all.

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

It is very true that a shepherd leaves his ninety-nine sheep to go and bring back the stray hundredth. Every religious hypothesis, however, with which we are acquainted goes much more on the theory that it is the ninety-nine sheep that go astray, and the odd one that stays where it should. The number of human sheep that are now, or at any period of history whatever have ever been, within the true religious fold, when compared with the number outside, would be such as to make us start back. If we could see the proportions stated in figures we should shudder.

13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that *sheep*, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

No one need be critical of the delightfully quaint way in which the shepherd's joy on recovering his stray sheep is here set forth; its setting at defiance of all rational estimate for the indulgence of a pleasing emotion, simply gives it a piquancy of an agreeable kind. In actual life men often

in a moment of generous impulse say egregious things, which come right from the heart without apparently passing through the head, and which the most austere moralist need not hesitate temporarily to fall in with. A man must be very morose who, on an auspicious occasion, cannot unbend and give way to genial nonsense.

A most joyful assurance. Here, at any rate, we can all heartily join in the prayer, "Thy will be done." And how easily might our heavenly Father give effect to this good will and this good wish! What, indeed, is there to prevent it? If a good man were in our heavenly Father's place, no human being would ever perish. Some might have a better fate than others, but all would be saved.

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Though the words "these little ones" were obviously spoken of and to little Jews in the first instance, we can hardly think, in spite of some not very assuring things we have met with, that they were meant to be confined thereto. And yet, whether this solicitude of the Father in heaven was at work for little Greeks, little Romans, little Hindoos, little Chinese, little Goths, little Mexicans, and little Negroes, it seems very hazardous to say. All these had certainly up to that time been left to perish if the absence of Judaism and Christianity meant perishing. These varied little ones had, indeed, religions of their own in which they were duly and fully indoctrinated. But when we remember Jesus' declaration about the vanity of false worship—the vanity of worshipping even Jehovah

in a false way—there seems no ground of hope that the following of these varied and huge religious delusions can have served to get these little ones' names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

These three verses are noteworthy, indeed. For Jesus here descends from the abstract to the practical.

15 ¶ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

And in doing so he illustrated a very old lesson; namely, how easy it is to enunciate sweeping maxims, and to lay down fine-looking injunctions and high-sounding theories; but how in practically applying even the best principles to human conduct, complications and difficulties soon ensue. The world was full of maxims and proverbs when Jesus came to it; many of them very excellent in their way. And if men were not already wise, it was not for want of what are called wise sayings. The statement that every portion of the sermon on

the mount was in the world when Jesus delivered it may be an exaggeration; but it is quite certain all the more important portions of it were.

It is a pregnant fact that in this—the almost if not quite solitary—instance in which Jesus made an attempt to work out and practically apply one of his theories, that of the persistently milky treatment of an offending brother, he found himself face to face with a contingency which compelled him to utter and finish with the very tame and earthly injunction, “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

This whole passage shows us that on this very important subject Jesus had nothing to offer; nothing to add to the known resources of poor human wisdom. Alas, Reader, how often does this same reflection force itself upon us as we read these Gospels!

The first recommendation of Jesus in dealing with an offending brother, is to go and show him his fault. This is the obvious and sensible way of first dealing with offences, and with misunderstandings and alienations between man and man of every sort. And in most cases it is happily, if done in a right spirit, an effectual way.

If this course fails, and it will sometimes fail, both in cases of offences and of misunderstandings, Jesus enjoins the taking of “one or two more.” They are to go, however, rather as witnesses than as mediators; the hypothesis Jesus is dealing with being that of a

trespass pure and simple. In civilized communities, however, trespasses—apart from the purely criminal classes—mostly arise from mistaken views of one's rights and from misinformation. The good offices of friends are often effectual in composing alienations, and in bringing an offending brother to see his error; and are admittedly the second course to have resort to.

If this course also fails, as it may and does, Jesus commands making the subject known to the Church; by which term at that time it is not easy to see what could be meant; by which term even now it is not certainly known what is meant. From this it appears that both the trespassing brother and the trespassed-upon brother were, by supposition, believers.

Of this expedient we wish to speak with every respect, though it is, of course, one not available with non-believers. Joint membership of an ecclesia of any kind would seem to offer special facilities for the settlement of brothers' differences. Still believers' quarrels have always had such a reputation for special bitterness, that we must say we have only slender faith in this third expedient of Jesus.

Recognizing the possible failure of the "Church's" intervention also, what has Jesus then to suggest? Why then he says, "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." We wonder how often these very processes had practically been gone through in the world, before Jesus delivered this amazing wisdom. How like, nay how identical, heavenly and human wisdom of a truth often are! To speak honestly, Reader, we distinctly and greatly prefer the latter.

Of a fourth course, then and yet in daily operation in the world, and much used even by Christians, that of bringing a trespass, if it be of a kind cognizable thereby, before a court of Justice, and impressing the offending brother in a very practical way, Jesus makes no mention. He tells us what we are to do when sued ourselves, but gives no directions about bringing offenders to justice. The self-confident apostle of the Gentiles tells us indeed that we are rather to submit to being defrauded than go to law; but his authority for saying so is far from clear, consisting, as it does, of his own mere assertion solely.

Jesus then ends by recommending us to regard such an offending brother as a "heathen and a publican." What else indeed is possible? We may indeed pray for those who despitefully use us, as

Jesus elsewhere recommended ; but it is obvious that the efficacy of such a proceeding rests entirely with Jesus himself. Our prayers will never affect the offender, unless Jesus makes them do so.

And is there not, Reader, surely something very unchristian, as we should now say, in this slighting reference to a "heathen man" and to a "publican"? Jesus' views of—at that time—and his modes of speaking of the heathen we know only too well. But do we not read how he fraternized with publicans some time back, and sat at meat even with them? Then how are we to understand this phrase, Let him be unto thee "as a publican"? Had Christians to shun publicans or to associate with them? How unkind, too, this cutting reference to publicans must have felt to our author.

This is a very characteristic illustration of this Gospel method of writing a history. We cannot be sure to whom this portentous promise was made. All we know is that Jesus at the time was "in the house," that his disciples came to him, and that a little boy was present.

Jesus had already conferred this prodigious power upon Peter: he here extends it to the other disciples, as the "you" here named is usually taken to mean. How such a power can be shared amongst a dozen men does not seem very feasible. One pope is intelligible; twelve scarcely are. To give one man power over all earthly things is at any rate comprehensible; to give the same power to eleven other men afterwards is not, to us at least. There is manifest danger of clashing in such an arrangement, unless we regard the whole of these twelve as divinely controlled to one mind; in which case these men are merely instruments worked upon or through, and these colossal powers are, in their human aspect, obviously a mere make-believe.

In what way these eleven—for in the case of one of the twelve the power must surely have been cancelled—ever interfered with our earthly affairs, in the sense here named, either then or since, it is of course quite impossible to trace.

Another, and perhaps the most curious, of the colossal promises of Jesus. He declares that if "two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done" by heaven.

Who can help wondering that some two of these men did not take the golden opportunity

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

of making our world very different from what it then or afterwards was? There was no limit to these requests; these men had but to ask "anything" and it would have been done for them.

Was there nothing that two of these men could agree to ask? Were they afraid of asking something great? It is impossible to see why they should be, for the promise was absolutely unlimited. Who can calmly think of men who could once have made our world as they wished it to be, but apparently did not? We cannot trace one single thing of a general and a knowable kind any two of these men ever agreed to ask; we cannot distinctly find an instance in which they availed themselves of this mighty promise. A little further on, indeed, we shall find two of these disciples agreeing to ask a certain thing from Jesus; but it was not a request of a general kind, it was purely for themselves personally. These two wished to sit one on each side of Jesus in his kingdom. Strangely enough they did not get even the promise of what they "agreed" to ask. According to Jesus there were difficulties in the way. The same seats in heaven cannot be given twice over even by omnipotence; in this respect differing from the power to bind and loose everything whatsoever on our planet which it seems can be conferred upon a dozen.

Jesus here vouchsafes another great promise, which involves on his part omnipresence, so far at least as our little globe is concerned. Two were sufficient to realize the preceding promise; here "two or three" are required. And wherever these two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, "there," says Jesus, "am I in the midst of them."

We doubt if any of the many enormous promises of Jesus are more difficult to realize and form a clear conception of than this one. From that day to the present the gatherings that have met in the name of Jesus have been of such a varied and such a heterogeneous kind, that any attempts that can be made to conceive Jesus' presence thereat are entirely baffled; become, indeed, painful if followed out.

In our own country, for example, at the present day, there are gathered together in Jesus' name every Sunday morning, assemblies of men met together to disseminate not merely inconsistencies, but direct doctrinal antagonisms of the most serious and fundamental

kind. To conceive the presence of Jesus at these varied assemblages becomes simply intolerable when dwelt upon.

We are quite aware that of the motley gatherings in the name of Jesus the world over, the claim to be duly and justly gathered in his name is mutually challenged and denied ; in the most important case of all, the right of all other kinds of claimants is emphatically disowned. With these internal contests, we, as spectators, have nothing to do. We are simply concerned with Jesus' promise as we here find it, absolutely without conditions or limitations of any kind. The varied kinds of believers may do here as they do elsewhere—supplement and qualify Jesus' own sayings according to their own predilections. Whether Jesus' presence is with all gatherings in his name ; with some only ; or with one kind alone must be left to those interested to decide as best they can.

The practical question which arises as we contemplate this promise of Jesus is, What does the presence of Jesus at these gatherings in his name mean and involve ? Does that presence mean guidance ? Such strange and contradictory things have been and are done by assemblies gathered in Jesus' name, that it is entirely impossible to regard Jesus' presence thereat as necessarily meaning guidance or even approval. The mutual and often bitter condemnations of each other by these varied gatherings show conclusively that though Jesus was present therein, his control and approbation of their proceedings are not even thinkable.

But if Jesus' presence at these gatherings in his name does not imply guidance or approval, what does it imply ? It does not imply protection as is very evident. Believers' gatherings of every kind have been dispersed and persecuted by the "world" ; by hostile creeds ; and, alas ! by each other. The general spirit of toleration and general weakening of religious beliefs have happily rendered these violences obsolete, except in a few backward countries, and even there they have become comparatively mild. Still even now the massacre of missionary parties ; the burning of a cathedral and a portion of the congregation ; the collapse of a roof and the crushing of some of those under it during divine service show us conclusively that the presence of Jesus on such occasions does not, unhappily, mean protection.

If not guidance, approval, or protection, what are we to understand by Jesus' presence at believers' gatherings ? If it be a recording and watching presence only, then the same may be

asserted of all gatherings and even of all individuals whatever ; for in its strict sense the omnipresence of Jesus involves his presence at a theatre, at a ball, at a racecourse, and at a Secularist meeting.

It seems impossible, therefore, to find in this promised presence of Jesus at believers' meetings any ascertainable meaning whatever of a natural kind. And if it be understood in some occult or spiritual sense, the same class of difficulties we have already adverted to equally presents itself.

Peter now asks Jesus how often he is to forgive an offending brother ; and in partial answer to his own

21 ¶ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

question suggests seven times as a likely number. It is quite possible this may have been with Peter a question arising out of an actual state of affairs ; he may have had an

offending brother other than his apostle-brother, for saints and sinners are, as we know, often met with in the selfsame family. Be this as it may, the point is one of a general character, and the light shone upon it by Jesus is available everywhere.

To this inquiry Jesus makes answer that an offending brother is to be pardoned not seven times but seventy times seven ; which for all practical purposes means, and which was probably intended to absolutely mean, *ad infinitum*. It does not

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times : but, Until seventy times seven.

appear whether penitence is to be presumed on the part of this very offending brother, or the pardon is to be unconditional. It does not however matter, for after a number of repetitions of his offence, the penitence, like the pardon, would be taken for granted ; both would become automatic. A simpler plan with this trespassing brother would be to give him *carte blanche*, and forgive him at the end of his course. Life is too short to spend all these forgivenesses on one offender.

How to deal with offenders is and has always been a great problem. We are all offenders ; the best of men even give many offences both of commission and still more of omission. But with normal men and women these offences are with rare exceptions of a minor kind, and tact and good sense are usually sufficient to deal with them.

But there are what may be called offenders proper ; those who transgress great laws and do so persistently. How to deal with such has been a problem in all ages ; and all conceivable methods

of treatment have been tried. Severity on the one hand, and mildness on the other, with every variety of the two combined, have been essayed; but the problem is still unsettled. And there are always many upon whom draconian harshness, brotherly fondling, and every other system are alike vain and thrown away.

Here we have the wisdom of Jesus laid before us on this subject. His method is to forgive offenders and to go on forgiving them. This is applicable, so far as is perceptible, to offences of all kinds and all sizes; a universal rule for dealing with great wrongs as well as small ones. There was nothing new in this principle itself, for preceding moralists had abundantly recommended, and shown the oft-time happy effect of mercy and leniency. The difference was that whilst they recognized the necessity of placing limits upon forbearance, Jesus—in this particular passage—denies such necessity, and enjoins unlimited forgiveness; for the limit of the number four hundred and ninety can be understood in no other sense, and is even itself equivalent thereto for all practical purposes.

Upon the method of dealing with offenders here enjoined for human practice it is surely unnecessary to dwell. We need hardly point out that it was not Jesus' own method of dealing with offenders. He did not forgive the Pharisees, or the Scribes, or the people of Capernaum, until seventy times seven times. And at the great day of judgment upon our species, his declared method of treating offenders is to be not unlimited forgiveness, but an unlimited furnace of fire. The burlesque of magnanimity enjoined for our use, and the pursuit of vengeance through eternity practised by Jesus himself, may well be left together.

Besides, Jesus' other method of treating an offending brother, previously enunciated in this very chapter, is itself the best comment upon the easy bit of generalization laid down in this verse. In the former case three expedients were to be tried upon an offending brother; if those failed, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen and a publican," said Jesus. Here an offender is to be pardoned without end. No better exemplification of the difference between the easy abstract and the difficult practical could be found than that set forth by Jesus in these two deliverances. Forgive him until seventy times seven; and after three efforts to deal with him, "Let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican," are specimens of wisdom that are very suitably found in the same chapter.

When will men learn that of all easy things, to enunciate

sounding phrases, and lay down sweeping rules for dealing with complicated things, are the very easiest; and when will they learn how little real merit or worth there is in doing this? There is no kind of celebrities the world is less indebted to than maxim-makers and proverb-compilers. A man who devises a modest piece of workable wisdom for every-day life is worth a score of so-called wise-saying propounders.

"70 times 7." The frequent use of numbers in this chapter gives it quite an arithmetical look. There is something rather pleasing in finding the Creator using such expressions as 99 out of a 100; 70 times 7; 10,000 talents; and 100 pence.

Metaphysicians have much discussed the problem of the absolute; whether, for example, mathematics, which to us seem absolutely true, are necessarily so outside the human mind. The use of numbers by the Second Person of the Trinity here displayed would at first seem strong proof of the absolute truth of arithmetical processes. But when we remember how surprisingly Jesus accommodated his utterances to current illusions of the time, from the wisdom of the serpent up to the most amazing way in which we shall shortly find him speaking of the heavenly bodies, any inference from what we here find as to the absolute truth of mathematics seems very precarious.

In this latter half of the Gospel narrative the miracles of Jesus are very few; indeed, a little further on they, or the detailed ones at least, cease altogether. The space occupied in the first half of this Gospel by accounts of miracles, is occupied in this second part by parables. These parables are not of the short kind we have hitherto met with, but are of some considerable length and much amplified with non-essential details. Their object too does not seem to have been the peculiar one we have seen announced by Jesus as his reason for using parables. On the contrary, these later parables, whether spoken to the disciples or to others, seem to have been intended to convey a lesson of some kind; and though it is not always possible to say with certainty what is really inculcated thereby, and though these parables are full of the inevitable drawbacks of such a mode of teaching, still in most of them it is not difficult to see the point Jesus intended. We have so little liking for parables, fables, allegories, or anything

23 ¶ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

of the nature of them, that our opinion of the relative merits of given parables and fables is probably of little value. But of how-ever little value our judgment in this matter may be, we shall honestly declare, Reader, that the allegation of theologians that the parables of Jesus are immensely better than all others is one in which we cannot concur. Some of Jesus' parables are excellent ; but some, both in their outlines and their contained moral, are as tame and poor as such things well can be.

From this verse to the end of the chapter is a parable known by the name of that of the unmerciful servant. Its moral is excellent ; as a specimen of parabolic art, everyone must judge of it for himself. Its various items are very exaggerated, and it is altogether of an extremely Oriental cast.

A certain king, taking account of his servants, found one that owed him 10,000 talents ; a sum in our money of £2,500,000. This is certainly a big debt. This servant must have been a very important one, and his royal master must have been in much more affluent financial circumstances than is usual with Eastern potentates.

This debt the servant was unable to pay, whereupon the king commanded this servant, along with his wife and his children, to be "sold," together with all he had. We can form no estimate of the selling value of this man, and of his wife and children ; these latter may have been worth some money, but the servant himself, as we shall see, would have been dear at a gift. With the proceeds of this sale, quaintly and majestically adds the king, "payment was to be made." Alas, with kings as with other mortals the value of a debt depends upon the debtor's assets ; and there is much reason to think that even after the sale of this servant's wife and children, this king would experience the process, well known in these days, of receiving so much in the pound only.

On hearing the king's decision, the servant "fell down and worshipped him"; a thing the unworthy are always the readiest to do. To such natures cringing is never what it is to better ones.

24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

The ready compliance, and kind heartedness of this king make us take to him greatly; and the lordly and truly regal way in which he draws his pen through £2,500,000 is quite exhilarating.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

The sequel, however, shows us how necessary it is to have a little care in letting ourselves be led away even by our most amiable feelings. This king would have done well to have deferred his decision a little while in order to make inquiry into the character of this servant, and how it had come about that he was unable to meet his vast obligation. There are debts and debts. To forgive a worthless spendthrift debtor, and to forgive a worthy and honest, but sick or unfortunate debtor, are two fundamentally different acts. In actual life we are often obliged to "forgive" both sorts; but our feelings in the two cases are widely different, as we all know.

Forgiveness of debt is all very well if we happen to have no debts of our own to meet therewith. Even this king could not do much sponging out of the kind here practised. Debts are in every way far better paid than even forgiven. And to most men forgiveness of debt is much more bitter than the toil necessary to pay.

This forgiven servant proved to be a mean creature indeed. His vast debt had been forgiven him; his wife and his children and all that he had had thus become his own again. And yet, having just had a debt of £2,500,000 forgiven, he proceeded to a fellow-servant who owed him under £4, laid hands on him, took him by the throat, and demanded payment. And yet upon this small debtor repeating to him the falling down and petition, not for forgiveness, but for time to pay, he had himself so successfully practised with the king, this wretch refused, and "cast him into prison." How entirely kindness is lost upon some natures is one of the most sorrowful things we can think of.

On the knowledge of this inhuman conduct of the forgiven but unmerciful servant coming to the king, he was sent for to the royal presence and upbraided as here given. But upbraiding was not all. The king withdrew his own forgiveness, and delivered the servant to the "tormentors," till

28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not: But went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31 So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou

wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me :

33 Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

he should pay all that was due unto him. What is meant by "tormentors" is admittedly not known; if it meant imprisonment, the prospect of the £2,500,000 ever being paid was very forlorn. Nor are we told whether the wife and children were still to be sold. Indeed, the parable closes in true parable fashion by leaving everything in a state of cloudy confusion.

A parable intended to inculcate merciful treatment and forgiveness of debt thus ends with both the debtors named in it in prison.

The lesson intended by this parable—to enjoin mercy and forbearance—is a noble one; how far this parable is likely to aid that end is not very clear. But behind this intended lesson there is, to our thinking, a much greater and more practical lesson that may be learnt from, even if not intended by, this parable, and that is the necessity of good sense and moderation in everything.

The hasty, uninquiring expunging of a debt of £2,500,000 is a grandiose proceeding devoid of discretion and good sense. The easy remission of debt or any other obligation never did and never can mean anything but an encouragement to easy contraction. To indulge in magniloquence after the fashion of this king is much easier than to take the trouble of investigation; and much pleasanter than to reflect that the deficit to the treasury of this large sum would involve replenishment by taxing other people. Undeserved generosity can never mean anything but the diversion to an unworthy object of resources due to worthy ones. What a sorry substitute for discretion impulse is, is the true lesson of this parable; a truth that had been taught by fathers to children from time immemorial when Jesus came on earth, and that is taught by all good fathers still.

"So likewise." It is sincerely to be hoped that the analogy between the heavenly Father and the king here portrayed is very remote. The hasty and harsh injunction to sell the debtor and his wife and children, followed by the rash forgiveness of the entire debt, finally ending in withdrawal of the promised pardon and deliverance of the forgiven debtor to hopeless torments, is a course of conduct ill befitting a sensible man, much

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

less a divine being. It is true there is one condition if we comply with which, Jehovah will not deal with us after the manner of this king. And that is that we forgive our brother's trespasses from our heart.

"From your hearts." This is an excellent exhortation. If we forgive it is in every way desirable that our forgiveness should not be half-hearted, but as complete as possible. The nominal forgivenesses and formal reconciliations so common in the world are often a veneer concealing unabated antipathy.

It is eminently desirable to forgive and take back to our hearts those who may have wronged us as completely as we are able. And happily, when forgiveness is followed by amendment, it is often possible to do this as regards some offences completely.

But there are offences and offences; and it is vain to attempt the impossible. A husband may forgive an unfaithful wife, or a wife an unfaithful husband; a man may forgive the treacherous partner who defrauded him, or the friend who betrayed him; a man may pardon the cashier who robbed him, or the man who knowingly slandered him. But not all the maxims that ever came down from heaven or were compiled on earth will ever make such "forgivenesses" to be other than what we know them to be. Esteem, love, and trust can no more be given by human beings in the absence of essential conditions, than we can do any other thing without the indispensable requisites thereto.

"Until seventy times seven"; "from your hearts"; "Let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican." Such, Reader, are the deliverances, and such the wisdom of Jesus on this very grave and very practical subject. They are a very characteristic specimen of "Christianity," and the varied ways in which Christians have applied and carried out these deliverances of the master afford some significant illustrations of practical exegesis.

For ourselves, having little faith in the efficacy of imposing and sweeping sayings in such matters, we shall apply these maxims of Jesus only in so far as their intrinsic merit may seem to deserve. We shall make no attempt to forgive anyone until seventy times seven; but shall use every reasonable effort, including the machinery of law and justice, to make incorrigible offenders behave themselves properly. If an offender ceases and amends, we will do our very utmost to carry out Jesus' excellent recommendation to forgive him "from our heart"; nothing shall be wanting that is

possible to completely restore him therein. And so do we wish to be ourselves treated. To an heathen man and to a publican we have, as such, no aversion whatsoever. It is, therefore, absolutely impossible for us in any way to apply this recommendation of Jesus. It is a pregnant and not altogether unmerited fact, that during the eighteen centuries that have elapsed since Jesus said this, the exhortation to "Let him be unto thee as a Jew," would have best expressed modern antipathy and modern ostracism. Happily in these days, thanks to noble human beings of all nations, noble thinkers and workers, national antipathies are fast passing away. In place of them we are learning to mutually see and own all the varied national excellencies, and to regard even national peculiarities and failings with gentle banter and good humour. The day bids fair to be not far distant when the brotherhood of mankind will have extinguished all the more ignoble and unworthy types of patriotism.

MATTHEW XIX.

JESUS now finally left Galilee, and started out upon his fatal visit to Jerusalem. According to Christian theory, he went to the Jewish capital to fulfil prophecy and destiny from which there was no possible escape. So contemplated, the following narrative loses all its purely human interest; for when actions are regarded in a fatalistic and non-alternative aspect all life is taken out of them.

CHAPTER XIX.
 2 *Christ healeth the sick: 3 answereth the Pharisees concerning divorcement: 10 sheweth when marriage is necessary: 13 receiveth little children: 16 instructeth the young man how to attain eternal life, 20 and how to be perfect: 23 telleth his disciples how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, 27 and promiseth reward to those that forsake anything to follow him.*

1 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judæa beyond Jordan:

It must be owned that Jerusalem seems a more appropriate scene for the life and works of Jesus than the obscure Galilean villages where he spent almost all his life. That city proved, however, as irresponsive as Nazareth, Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida had done.

It appears that Jesus did not take the direct and shortest way to Jerusalem, but crossed over to the eastern side of the Jordan river. We can form but a vague notion where the events recorded in this chapter took place.

A characteristic specimen of our author's style. He leaves us to make out for ourselves where these great multitudes came from. Had they followed Jesus all the way from Galilee? If so, they could hardly need much healing; and it certainly seems unlikely Jesus would bring ailing folks from Galilee into the coasts of Judea and heal them "there." It is more likely the prophet of Nazareth had been heard of in these coasts of Judea—for long ago, as we may remember, his fame had travelled over "all Syria"—and that hence his appearance in these districts gathered these ailing concourses around him.

Whilst Jesus was in these coasts of Judea some Pharisees came to question him concerning what may without hesitation be termed the gravest of human problems—the right relationship of man and woman. The whole subject is indeed but slightly dealt with and touched upon; still the point raised by these Pharisees, and which had the happy effect of eliciting the following wisdom of Jesus thereupon, is one of vital importance. The permanent or terminable nature of the marriage union is a question of supreme gravity.

Our author, as usual, declares this inquiry of the Pharisees to have been a tempting of his master. It would have been fortunate and well if either these Pharisees or anyone else had tempted Jesus in this sensible manner much oftener. It would have been well if our author and his co-disciples, instead of putting to Jesus the vapid interrogations they did, had asked him many questions of the kind here put by these Pharisees.

"For every cause." We do not feel at all sure that our author fairly or correctly reports what these Pharisees said. His previous accounts of the interviews between Jesus and the Pharisees and the ill-motives he ascribes to the latter on every occasion, do not tend to make us feel much confidence in his versions of what they said here or elsewhere. As a matter of fact, however, the greatest differences of opinion existed amongst the Jews as to what justified a man in "putting away" a wife. One would have thought the divine code which the Jews, and they alone, possessed, would have shone with a clearness and a brightness on such a subject as to make uncertainty impossible. What kind of light that divine code really emits on this great subject may be seen by anyone referring

2 And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

3 ¶ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

thereto. It is enough to say that anything more utterly shameful than what is there found was never framed. On this head of sex relationship the Jewish code and Jewish practices render large parts of the Jewish Scriptures totally unfit to read on the score of common decency even.

To the inquiry put to him, Jesus commences his reply by asking these Pharisees if they had not read how "he which made them at the beginning made them male and female." The Pharisees prided themselves upon their intimate and minute knowledge of Scripture, and had doubtless often read what Jesus here draws their attention to. But what light they or anyone else could derive upon the matter in hand from the obvious and elementary fact that our race consists of male and female is not very clear. Like the human species, almost all other animal species consist of male and female also. And yet we find amongst them almost every conceivable variety of sexual arrangement, with little, if anything, in the nature of permanent marriage of individuals. Yet all these varied arrangements with other species have presumably the sanction of the same Creator, who made them male and female also.

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female,

these Pharisees if they had not read how "he which made them at the beginning made them male and female." The Pharisees prided themselves upon their intimate and minute know-

ledge of Scripture, and had doubtless often read what Jesus here draws their attention to. But what light they or anyone else could derive upon the matter in hand from the obvious and elementary fact that our race consists of male and female is not very clear. Like the human species, almost all other animal species consist of male and female also. And yet we find amongst them almost every conceivable variety of sexual arrangement, with little, if anything, in the nature of permanent marriage of individuals. Yet all these varied arrangements with other species have presumably the sanction of the same Creator, who made them male and female also.

Nor do the further facts here adduced by Jesus—that a man leaves his parents to take a wife, and that the two become "one flesh"—determine the question in hand; though the latter fact in one of its senses has an important bearing upon it.

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

A man may take a wife, and they may cleave to each other; or they may become the bitterest of foes. So, too, a man and woman may become "one flesh," either literally by offspring, or figuratively by a true union of hearts, either with marriage or without. All the data here named by Jesus are equally open to the advocates and the opponents of divorce; to the advocates and opponents even of marriage itself.

It is not a little startling, too, to find on reference that the statement here attributed to Jehovah was really made by Adam. We are quite aware that such trifling inaccuracies do not disturb commentators; and we have now got quite accustomed to the Gospel method of "quoting" Scripture. These commentators assure us that though these words were Adam's, they really came from Jehovah. They omit, however, to tell us how they have ascertained

this; for they do not profess that all Adam said came from that source.

We are not amongst those who think the origin of this saying a matter of importance. What Jehovah says and what man says are so extremely alike, that it is vain to attempt to discriminate.

“What God hath joined together.” This is one of those endless phrases in the world that sound and look so well, so long as men do not insist upon knowing what they really mean. What is this joining? Does it apply to monogamy only or to polygamy also? Men and women become “one flesh,” alas! without marriage of any kind. Does their having become “one flesh” mean that God has “joined” them? or is it the magic of some civil or religious ceremony that makes them “one flesh”?

Two verses further on we find to our astonishment that what even God has joined together may, after all, be put asunder. The prohibition to put away a wife is not absolute. There is an “except” to it. Marriage is thus not indissoluble. After all this transcendentalism we come back to the plain question raised by these Pharisees, What should dissolve a marriage? Jesus says one thing only. To Christians that view is of course final. To others the question remains still to be determined upon its own merits.

The Pharisees in answer to what Jesus had said, give him an extremely awkward point to deal with. They wish to know why Moses, in other words Jehovah, and, as we know, in other words Jesus himself, gave his well-known orders concerning divorcement, which may yet be read in all their beauty in that very book of Deuteronomy with which Jesus nonplussed Satan on the exceeding high mountain.

Anything more unsatisfactory than the reply made by Jesus to this rejoinder of the Pharisees it is impossible to conceive; anything more calculated to arouse the just indignation of earnest Jews could not be imagined. Moses, says Jesus, “because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives.” In plain words Moses, instead of condemning and prohibiting iniquity, connived at and pandered to it.

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

But let us look at this allegation a little more closely. If Moses suffered the people to do this flagrant iniquity, who suffered Moses to permit such immorality? Was it not Jehovah; in other words, Jesus himself? Moses, however, as a matter of fact, "suffered" a great many other evil things besides the putting away of wives. He suffered polygamy, slavery, and many other enormities; and many of his barbarous enactments excite the loathing of anyone who now reads them. The plain truth is that amongst the many famous lawgivers of antiquity, none outraged morality, righteousness, and purity so often and so persistently as Moses did.

"From the beginning it was not so." If we take the word beginning in its strict sense, it is obvious enough that on the theory that our species originated with a created pair, sex relationship must at the outset have been purity and simplicity itself. But when on that theory we reflect upon the painful incest which would at once be necessary to continue the species, it is best to draw a veil over the sexual arrangements that prevailed at the "beginning." When in his nine hundred and thirty-first year Adam looked around upon his descendants, it must have been in one sense a very horrible spectacle.

If by "beginning" Jesus meant the pre-Mosaic period, the reference is not a very happy one. Sex relationship during that period is unstintedly displayed to us in the Pentateuch; notably in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, those three eminent saints with whom the monks and nuns of modern times have now, or in due course will have, the honour of sitting down in a certain kingdom.

The phrase "hardness of your hearts" does not seem a very fair way of putting it. These men could not help the depravity of their forefathers in Moses' time. Indeed, it was Moses' yielding to that depravity that gave rise to the divergent views of divorce then prevalent, and which had brought these very men to come and interrogate Jesus on the matter. The "because" of this verse is probably the most extraordinary allegation ever made by a moral teacher. If the hardness of men's hearts be taken as a justification or even the slightest palliation of wrongdoing, morals are practically abolished.

One reason is still allowed by Jesus to justify a man in putting away a wife—her fornication. That act sunders

9 And I say unto you,
Whosoever shall put

what even God had joined together. And

away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

rightly so. But neither God nor man can rend asunder, even in that lamentable event, the bond which Nature may have established by means of a common child. That is a nexus which neither human nor divine law can dissolve.

In what Jesus here proceeds to add he simply repeats what he stated in the sermon on the mount; and leaves the subject again in the same ambiguity he left it there. Whether Jesus here and there sanctions or condemns the marriage of a divorced person has given rise to a great controversy, which remains unsettled and insoluble for the same reason that other great controversies about his sayings remain so; that is, he did not make his meaning clear, but so expressed himself as to be quite open to opposite interpretations. Why Jesus, foreseeing the uncertainty his expressions would lead to, did not prevent it by a few clear words, we leave to others to solve. This is but one of many like instances. Half-a-dozen clear sentences would have avoided the leading strifes which have brought the household of faith to disruption.

What these inquiring Pharisees said of the amazing wisdom they had just listened to, our author does not deem worthy of record. Jesus, of course, knew what they thought of it, and it seems a pity it does not transpire. The effect of Jesus' declaration upon himself and co-disciples, however, our author proceeds to give us. They thought, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry"! This seems to have been the joint and unanimous apostolic opinion. Concerning our author and ten of his colleagues we know nothing regarding their married or unmarried state; but their chief had certainly experienced the joys and sorrows of conjugal life. The daughter of Peter's mother-in-law was doubtless a woman of many virtues and many attractions; but intermixed therewith we may safely aver that there were some imperfections also. Though it is mere conjecture, we are inclined to think Peter was the spokesman of this joint sentiment.

This apostolic view of indissoluble marriage is a pessimistic one we entirely dissent from; though it must be owned that many such unions of two human beings are most deplorable. To these men, accustomed to the loose marriage notions of the Jews, the idea of interminable unions would naturally seem severe. The Mosaic regulations practically allowed a man to put away his wife at

¶ His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

pleasure; but gave liberty also to the put-away wife. "She may go and be another man's wife," said Moses. Amongst the Jews marriage bore little resemblance to the conception of it current in modern times; or to the view taken of it by the Greeks, the Romans, and other ancients even.

And what, Reader, was Jesus' reply to this declaration of his

11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

disciples? Here it is. "All men cannot receive this saying save they to whom it is given."

We much doubt if any man can receive this verse in the very subordinate sense of extracting from the words of which it is composed any meaning whatever.

What saying is it that all men cannot receive? And what is it that is given to some? And who are they? And yet this purports to be a divine declaration on one of the gravest of human duties!

We are quite aware, Reader, that we are amongst the many who cannot receive this and many other sayings found in these Gospels. But we are not repining about it; we are quite satisfied our loss is not great.

Christian commentators, of course, receive this saying and know all about it. They are a receiving and knowing race. Their method of explaining this verse is the usual one of making a number of statements, and then declaring those statements to be what Jesus meant, though he did not exactly say. Here, however, as elsewhere, these knowing commentators do not all see things in the same light. Some declare the "saying" mentioned by Jesus in this verse is the saying delivered by himself in the ninth verse of this chapter; others say it refers to that of the disciples in the tenth verse; and others to the discourse of Jesus concerning eunuchs in the twelfth. There is no reason why readers should not select from these the explanation which suits them best.

Jesus now proceeds to favour the disciples with a strange disser-

12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

tation concerning eunuchs. A more infelicitous subject to connect with that of marriage could not well be conceived.

He divides eunuchs into three kinds; those born so; those made so by others; and those who make themselves so. Jesus' information regarding the first two kinds was very old news, as it must be owned the information he gave on humanly knowable matters was generally.

Not so, however, with regard to the third species, "eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." This statement startles pious Christians even yet.

Self denial, self torments, mortifications of the flesh, sackcloth, hairshirts, fastings, and retirement from the world of life, with endless other things of a like kind in connection with and as preparations for and purchases of the many kingdoms of heaven we know well. But castration as a mode of preparation therefor takes us aback.

The kingdom of heaven was at that time a very recent institution and possessed but few adherents; and it would have been interesting to know which and how many of its members had performed this elegant operation upon themselves. It is very noticeable that Jesus makes no comment upon that queer mode of showing attachment to the heavenly kingdom. He neither praises it nor censures it; he leaves it in the state of delightful uncertainty he left so many other things he spoke of.

Still, the mention by Jesus of this singular act of some of his followers without disapprobation, seems to give a tacit sanction to it. And it must be owned that it is in entire accordance with the philosophy of plucking out offending eyes, and cutting off offending hands, enjoined and re-enjoined by himself. Castration indeed seems an especially eligible illustration of this policy, for it eliminates a part of our frame particularly likely to "offend."

"He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." As, like other commentators, we are unable to make out what is here referred to, we can form no estimate of the value of what may be received by the fortunate man who is equal to the receipt thereof. Presumably, as in the preceding verse, only those can receive this saying "to whom it is given." All efforts on the part of others to receive these sayings are obviously vain; and we must try to get on without them as well as we can.

"He that hath ears to hear let him hear" was not a very elegant phrase, but he that is able to receive, let him receive, is a still more cynical injunction. This disquisition on eunuchs shares with the verse describing the massacre of the little Bethlehemites the honour of being the longest in this Gospel, as set before us by this authorized version.

Such, Reader, were the deliverances of Jesus upon this, the most important of human problems. Fortunately, the institution

of permanent marriage rests upon other and far better foundations than any assigned by Jesus. It is based, not upon any extrinsic considerations, but upon its own intrinsic merits. It is securely founded upon the solid ground of its own utility. It is the best system of regulating the relationship of man and woman which our race has discovered. But like all other institutions, so entirely does marriage rest upon its own inherent qualities, that if a better system could ever be devised, that better system would and ought to at once take its place.

The permanent marriage of one man to one woman holds the field against all alternatives, not because of any external sanction, but because of its own inherent merits; because of its great superiority to any other system. It combines the greatest quantity of advantages with the fewest disadvantages—the self-same ground on which all other wise institutions rest also.

Polygamy, polyandry, free love, promiscuity, terminable unions, or any other actual or hitherto suggested forms of sexual economy proffer themselves in vain. And if there is a great controverted question that may be regarded as finally settled it is the question of marriage.

So long as Nature produces the two sexes in equal numbers, polygamy and polyandry may be dismissed from consideration, and the only questions which remain are whether the union of one man and one woman should be entered into as terminable or as lifelong; and in the latter case, whether any, and if so, what causes may dissolve such union.

Into the former question it is not necessary to enter at length. Children may be said to determine it. They are a bond between father and mother that cannot be “terminated.” Apart from that, terminable unions are practically promiscuity, as anyone entering therein must feel; and experience abundantly shows how liable the mutual and mutually terminable attraction on which such temporary alliances are supposed to be based, is to itself “terminate” very early. Sexual passion is a sandy foundation alone to build upon; and a more unworthy motive force than sexual impulse to guide the actions of rational beings repeatedly, could not be named. All the sentiment, the poetry, the romance, and halo that surround, and justly surround, the entrance into a lifelong union of a man and a woman are sought in vain in any other system. The sentiments that characterize polygamy, free

love, or any other sexual arrangements except permanent marriage, are simply those of an Oriental seraglio, a racing stud, or a set of farmyard poultry.

With regard to the causes that may dissolve a marriage, it may truly be said that mankind are so deeply concerned in the protection, the honour, and the reverence of marriage itself, that any dissolution of it whatever ought to be regarded with the gravest misgiving. It is here, as it is, alas! so often in human affairs, a question of the choice of the smaller of two evils. To enter here into a question so complicated is not needful; but we may take the opportunity, Reader, of here recording our earnest conviction that the best interests of humanity are greatly involved in the honour, the purity, and the permanence of the marriage union.

This is an incident that throws many Christian commentators

into raptures. And yet what is there extraordinary about it? Anthing more ordinary and more natural we cannot conceive. Surely love of children is no rarity; it is probably the most universal of human feelings, and in showing it Jesus simply displayed an amiability of a very ordinary kind.

13 ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said. Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

And yet to read some of the effusions on this passage one would think Jesus of Nazareth was the very first who ever put his hands on little children and blessed them; one would suppose that act had never been previously accomplished, and that all who do it now and fancy they do it spontaneously are simply imitating what is here recorded of the Prophet of Nazareth.

We are not now raising the question of the relative efficacy of the act as performed by Jesus, or by others. Christians may ascribe whatever virtue they may think fit to this touch of Jesus. They may believe—and we hope truly—that these little ones grew up to be noble men and women; and they may attribute whatever other blessed results they please to this laying on of hands by Jesus. All we maintain is, that the act itself is as old as our race itself.

That touch and contact with the great conveyed virtue was an ancient and very prevalent idea. The sincere belief in, and the struggles to obtain, the touch of even such specimens of humanity as our own kings existed, and took place in this country during the

last century even; and the accounts thereof form melancholy but instructive reading.

That the blessings of the good may really influence us for good is quite conceivable naturally; but in the case of children any such result is only ascribable to supernatural causes.

“And pray.” These people did not know they were addressing Emmanuel; they did not know even that Jesus was the Christ. They had evidently brought these children to receive a prophet’s blessing and a prophet’s prayers.

“For of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Whom the gods love die young, said the ancient Greeks. It would seem that all the little ones who die in childhood must surely go to heaven. They have had no time to do wrong. Will they remain children in heaven? or will their growth continue in that glorious clime, and expand into celestial manhood and womanhood? If this latter be so, what a blessing early death is indeed!

We are sorry to say, Reader, that this happy fate for the cut-off little ones is much impugned. Christian theological literature abounds with theological garbage, in which it is set forth that all unbaptized little ones—that is, the vast majority—go to quite another place than heaven.

In days when our race was believed to begin with Adam, that worthy’s transgression was said to impart to every babe a portion of what was called “original” sin, that is, Adam’s own sin; and this speck was declared to be quite sufficient to damn the little creature, without any superadded sins of its own. In pursuance of this theory a clergyman, we understand, is still wakened up to come and sprinkle a dying babe, and thus transfer it from the hell to which it was otherwise on its way to the kingdom of heaven. Possibly after performing this exploit, he will next day compose a sermon on foreign missions, in which the superstitions of the benighted heathen will be pathetically lamented; though those superstitions will be searched in vain for one more inane and contemptible than this of his own.

On his way from Jericho to the capital—in the third Gospel, previous to his arrival in the former place—

16 ¶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

Jesus was accosted by a rich young man, who wished to know how he was to obtain “eternal life.” By that term, eternal happiness, in other words heaven itself, is obviously meant;

for eternal life in the other place is clearly not an object of desire. We ought, however, to bear in mind that those celebrated Christian institutions, heaven and hell, had then not been revealed except to a very few, who had heard Jesus propound them; and owing to the most conspicuous absence from the Jewish scriptures of any declaration on the subject, men's views in Judea upon the subject of a future life were then of a most hazy and most controverted kind. The inherent immortality of man, so well known to modern theologians, was not at that time much thought of; the much villified Pharisees, curiously enough, being then the most prominent advocates of a future life for our species.

Seeing that there is no name under heaven by which men can be saved but that of Jesus, it has always been a problem how anyone could possibly be saved before that name was ever heard of. Still Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Elijah somehow accomplished the task; but by what means we do not know. And in the long ages before the time of Jesus, as since, men everywhere who wished it had tried all kinds of ways and methods and recipes for earning and procuring "eternal life"; with what success is not known.

The desire to live for ever seems very strong in some men. Doubtless most of these would prefer perpetuity in this world, if obtainable. But Nature will not hear of perpetuity as regards our bodies; so we have to trust for continued existence to our souls. Many think this is trusting in broken reeds. Souls are certainly very shadowy things, concerning which our knowledge is most meagre. All we know of them is that, whilst they are with our bodies, they seem to follow and depend thereupon in a somewhat servile manner. When our bodies are infants so are our souls. When we are physically boys and girls, our souls are correspondingly boyish and girlish; and so on throughout our lives. In old age our souls become worse like our bodies, and like them often decrepit even. This growth and decay of souls do not seem very re-assuring for their everlasting existence. Bodily diseases, too, affect our souls most alarmingly; brain ailments reducing them to impotence.

When death effects the severance of body and soul, the latter, we are assured, continues to exist for ever; a fact, however, that it must be acknowledged we know from religious founders and spiritualistic mediums only.

This rich young man wished to have eternal life, and addressing Jesus said, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may

have eternal life"? A question that now as ever meets in the world with a perfect Babel of answers; for where nothing is known the field is open to everyone who cares to assert. Knowledge ends dissensions. This is why religious differences never do end.

To this young man's question the Babel of answers that now comes in response even from the Christian household of faith itself is not a little astonishing. On the theory of election, the question, "What shall I do?" is needless; there is nothing to be done. On the open theory that our beliefs or our acts, or a mixture of both, will determine our everlasting fate, the question, "What shall I do?" is clearly a most momentous one; though it is surely a singular arrangement that the eternal fate of a spiritual and everlasting being should be determined during its momentary existence in a physical alliance on this little planet of ours.

What shall I do? The confusion of responses which comes from Christendom itself is indeed most distressing. The great Christian Church now, as ever, returns her inflexible answer that outside her pale there is no salvation; nay, her great theologians assure us that schism is even more deadly than sheer unbelief. The minor Christian churches have their endless and varying recipes.

What shall I do to be saved? is a most pathetic question. And what men have done in all ages of the world in order to be saved is a most pathetic and often most sorrowful record. A man who believes that he has an everlasting soul, whose eternal destiny will be determined by what he believes and does during his little sojourn here, is indeed an object of sympathy even to those who think he is agitating himself quite needlessly. Putting ourselves for the moment in his place, we feel what a fearful anxiety such a man must have. What are we to do? Even if we cast aside as of no account those vast and venerable religions immense multitudes are following, and confine ourselves to the Christian system alone, what do we find? On our left men are beseeching us to follow them; on our right others are imploring us to go with them; here, men are vociferating that there is no way but theirs; there, men are begging us as we value our souls to seek salvation with them. Whatever we do, we join a small minority. Whichever road we take we have but few fellow-travellers; we leave behind the great bulk of our fellow-men. For in religion it is only possible to join a small minority, do what we will.

"Good Master." This young man had evidently little conception

whom he was addressing. He probably thought Jesus simply one more of those religious founders, prophets, or religious teachers, who have been so undesirably numerous in the world. Had he known Jesus to be the Second Person of the Trinity he could not have failed to "sell all he had," as directed by him, which it is quite clear he did not do.

To answer a question by asking another was little short of a fixed principle with the Prophet of Nazareth. Once and again this course may be very well; but we cannot help here recording, Reader, how thoroughly we have come to dislike it as a constant practice.

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

"Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one—God." As this question remains unanswered, it seems a pity it was asked; for surely it was a querulous finding fault with a very small matter. To many modes of Eastern salutation just objection may be taken; for they are fulsome and inflated to a degree; but the adjective here criticized by Jesus is surely a very modest one. A very little further on Jesus claims it, and applies it to himself.

Then what perplexities, too, this question of Jesus, and its accompanying assertion, have given rise to! The deprecation of the term good as applied to himself, and the declaration that no one is good but God, seem as if they might have been intended for the very purpose they have so much been used—that heretical Unitarian purpose of drawing a distinction between Jesus and God. Hence we see that Trinitarian commentators have had to resort to the most inconvenient expedients to solve or soften this awkward phrase. And after all their explications of it there it is still. "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but God."

"But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Is there not a noticeable ambiguity here, Reader? Is the "life" here named the "eternal life" inquired about by this young man? If it be, then it is quite clear that there was a way of salvation even before Christ came.

Well might this young man say "Which?" The Mosaic commandments were legion; and the quality of many of them was anything but unexceptionable; many were, indeed, far better left altogether unobserved. Had this young man

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

been a listener to a certain sermon delivered in Galilee some two or three years back he would have heard many "commandments" ordered to be not kept but broken, and their very opposites enjoined.

A most significant word, indeed, was that young man's "Which?" The increasing enlightenment of mankind had rendered a selection from Moses' commandments a necessity, and the keeping of the whole of them out of the question. Which of Moses' commandments are still binding and which abrogated has greatly harassed modern Christendom even; and as no known religious principle can be laid down to determine this question, it is a very open question still.

To this inquiry of the young man Jesus replies by enumerating the six commandments here given. In the third Gospel only five are named; the last and far most exacting here given by Matthew being omitted, as it also is in the next Gospel, where the commonplace "Do not defraud" is named instead.

It thus appears that the observance of these six or five commands would procure entrance "into life." And what are these six commands? Why, they are simply six purely human duties. Not a morsel of religion or even religious belief of any kind is involved in any one of them. To enter into life it was then only necessary to discharge a number of merely and purely human duties! Does it not, Reader, seem a great pity that entrance into life was rendered so much more difficult afterwards? We have now to believe aright; at the peril of our souls we have now to seek and find the true religious creed—a task, indeed! The conditions of salvation laid down at various times by Jesus in these Gospels are a curious study and a curious medley. They are easy and they are exacting in a most extraordinarily alternating fashion.

To this the young man responded by saying that he had fulfilled these six conditions already; he had kept these six commands from his "youth up." He evidently felt that the keeping of these commands was really too easy a consideration for eternal life, and suggested the question, "What lack I yet?"

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

We much fear that in one point this young man was over self-confident. Five of these commands—the only ones named in the third Gospel, and also the six named in the second Gospel—are not

difficult of compliance. There is nothing whatever arduous about them. But the last command, as given in this Gospel, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is a formidable one indeed. We have no doubt whatever that this young man had fully complied with the first five commands—we have great scepticism as to his fulfilment of this sixth. Still, though this sixth command is, in its literal sense, an impossibility, this young man may have reasonably tried to fulfil it; and Jesus did not dispute the young man's assurance of his fulfilment, unless the further command to sell all he had may be regarded as an impugning, which seems doubtful.

In response to the young man's suggestion, "What lack I yet?"

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

Jesus gave him an additional command of a very practical and very drastic kind; with which it appears he did not attempt compliance. He had already admittedly done sufficient to "enter into life." How far

obedience to Jesus' further command would have affected his eternal life he probably could not gather; this very important point is not made clear.

"If thou wilt be perfect." To this end Jesus prescribed two things: "Go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor" and "come and follow me." Following Jesus, as we, alas! know only too well, did not necessarily lead to perfection. We have still less confidence in the first recipe.

"Go and sell that thou hast"—in the second Gospel it is "whatsoever thou hast," in the third "all that thou hast"—"and give to the poor." To our thinking a worse piece of advice could not well have been tendered. As a general proposition the injunction is an unmitigated absurdity; sheer anarchism. Modern commentators contend that this command is not to be taken as a general one; and it is, indeed, clear enough that it is not so regarded by modern believers. The attempt to designate some of Jesus' commands as general and some as special is admittedly a very dangerous proceeding. Jesus himself did not think fit to make any careful or specified distinction between the two sorts; and it is clearly dangerous work attempting it now.

Even as a special command to this young man, we have no faith whatever in the recommendation. How was he going to live after he had parted with his last shekel? He would have to do some-

thing for a livelihood. And was he more likely to have more time at his disposal—not to mention means—for aiding the new cause after this denudation? Even the realization of his “great possessions” and anything like a careful distribution of it amongst the “poor,” would occupy no small time, as anyone who has gone about in search of deserving poor well knows. His following Jesus would thus be seriously delayed, when we think of the very short time then remaining to enjoy the “Good Master’s” companionship.

“Go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor.” The meaning of this saying to us in these days, according to commentators, is that we are to give a reasonable proportion of our substance to good purposes, especially to religion. After commentators have trimmed and pared the sayings of Jesus, we really do not recognize them.

However justified in qualifying the exhortation to sell their “all” Christians may now be, what right have they to alter the destination of the proceeds? It is to the poor, not to religious machinery, Jesus always enjoins men’s charity.

The true and reasonable spirit of humanity and fellow-feeling and kindness to others, and the still nobler purpose of bringing about better and juster social arrangements so as to make the painful forms of charity unneeded, will never, Reader, be furthered by entravagant sayings either of Jesus or of anyone else. Excess never fails to defeat its very object. If Jesus had spoken to this young man in words conveying the meaning commentators now allege we are to gather from this sweeping injunction, he would probably not have gone “away,” but have remained and rendered much-needed service to the struggling new faith.

“And thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” Religious “sacrifice” is really an investment of which a careful ledger account seems to be kept; and upon which—according to all religious founders—prodigious interest is reckoned. Though temporarily stripped of all his possessions, this young man would, had he adopted Jesus’ recommendation, have really been depositing the proceeds in a celestial bank where they would have expanded beyond all estimate.

“Come and follow me.” The command of Jesus to come and follow him had not always the happy effect it had in our author’s case. In the case of our author and of his colleagues it is evident the obstacle here in question—great possessions—was non-existent.

At the same time not only Christianity but all other religions also furnish us with abundant examples of men of wealth and even royal, noble, and other distinguished personages abandoning all and becoming monks, fakirs, hermits, and divers other exemplifications of self-inflicted penury, for the various paradises' sakes.

It seems a curious and puzzling question whether this young man is now enjoying eternal life with Jesus, or is in a certain other place of a widely different kind. Much may be said in favour of either view. He had done what was needful to "enter into life." On the other hand he had not yielded to the counsel of perfection given to him by Jesus, who, we are told in the next Gospel, "loved him." And he had rejected the direct personal invitation of Jesus to "come and follow me." The matter must remain undecided; but we sincerely hope our Christian friends may meet with him in the better land, for it seems cruel indeed to think that a young man who had loved his neighbour as himself from his youth up should be lost.

With this young man eternal life was an object of search. According to modern theologians eternal life is compulsory with us all. We are all everlasting beings whether we wish it or not; immortality is a forced gift we are bound to accept. And the threat of an eternal life of excruciating misery for all who are not Christians is still one of the main agencies for propagating Christianity; albeit an agency whose potency is in these latter ages a mere simulacrum of what it once was.

After the death of Jesus, with the object apparently of carrying out the injunction to "sell all thou hast," the apostles and early Christians acted upon the command, and attempted to found Christian society upon a communistic basis. We read that they had all things in common. Believers sold their lands and other possessions and laid the proceeds at the disciples' feet. The extreme rigour with which this was enforced is shown in the shocking instance of Ananias and his wife. These two, who must obviously have been more or less sincere believers to sell their lands at all, realized their properties, and wishing to retain a portion of the proceeds, offered the remainder to the disciples; a course not only in harmony with their perfect right to do so, but a course—as the eventual upshot of this communistic experiment proved—which showed much prudence and real good sense.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

For this "offence," which Peter, with true ecclesiastical ingenuity, pronounced to be one against the Holy Ghost, we read that he smote Ananias dead on the spot; and upon his wife Sapphira coming in shortly afterwards, he repeated the act upon her also; first saying to her in true Oriental style that the feet of those who had carried away her husband's body were at hand to carry away her own also.

This first memorable ecclesiastical attempt to control the temporal affairs of believers has been copiously followed since; though there is not even in papal annals, amidst all the barbarities therein, anything so atrocious as this deed of the first pope. Religious terrorism has extorted vast sums and vast estates in times past. In our times, though the sum total of celestial revenue collected on our planet is still great, the Christian portion of it is almost entirely voluntary; extorted by religious entreaty only. With Peter's successor, for example, the large revenue known by the name of Peter's pence is purely voluntary or enforceable only by threats of what can be done in the next world.

This attempt of the apostles and first Christians to found their society upon a negation of economic laws—like every similar attempt before or since—collapsed. And if men possessed of unlimited miracle power could not make such quixotism work, we need not wonder that other like attempts have not succeeded. The form in which this apostolic experiment was administered is only vaguely hinted at. We hear of quarrels and disputes about the relief of widows. And there is no doubt the experiment broke down, as all like ones have done, from inherent impracticability.

We live in an age, Reader, in which the great problem of the just distribution of wealth is clearly and righteously coming to the front. Great improvements upon the past have indeed already been accomplished in many ways; the discoveries of Science, and inventions of machinery having in many respects revolutionized old social arrangements.

Still, the painful disparities of material welfare which exist even in the most advanced countries are now arresting the earnest attention of all thoughtful men. A fairer and juster distribution of the good things of life is a great end that is forcing itself into men's hearts and consciences everywhere. And one of the best signs in connection with this great question is that amongst wealth possessors, amongst those of us who profit by existing arrangements,

there is a general confession and acknowledgment of the injustice of the present constitution of society, and a willingness to co-operate in all practicable measures to bring about a better state of things.

But that beneficent end will never be attained by ignoring or defying economic laws. Crude attempts to override natural laws have not furthered but delayed real reforms; and that will be their result whenever tried again. Those happier social arrangements towards which we are assuredly moving, in which the appalling contrasts of wealth and poverty now existing will exist no longer, and in which one child will no longer be born in a mansion and another in a slum, will only be brought about and secured by working with and through those economic laws, resistance to which is as futile and vain as resistance to the law of gravitation itself. Men may sell all they have and give the proceeds either to apostles or to the poor as often as they like; but they will never aid thereby to obtain or secure any real amelioration of the present state of things.

Jesus was evidently displeased at the refusal of his call by this young man; and proceeded to set forth to the disciples the frightful danger which the possession of riches involves. "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." It may, we think, well be doubted if a single one had entered that kingdom up to the time in question. And how the early Christians at once got rid of any riches they may have had, and how Peter insisted upon complete stripping, we have just been speaking of.

Not satisfied with his declaration that a rich man could "hardly" enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus proceeds to declare it impossible. For a rich man to enter the kingdom of God—which we presume is the same institution as the kingdom of heaven—Jesus declares to be more difficult than for "a camel to go through the eye of a needle." Many attempts—etymological, metaphorical, and sophistical—have been made to compress the word camel, and inflate the word needle. In modern times Christianity and riches are frequently conspicuously allied and exemplified in the same person; and it is truly astonishing how complacently the terrible risk, nay, the certain fatal result, of

23 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

such an incubus upon faith here warned against by Jesus, is piously hazarded. And it is vain here to attempt the distinction between "special" and "general" sometimes essayed with the statements of Jesus; for these declarations are as general as can possibly be conceived.

For a camel to go through a needle's eye was a vulgar expression of the time for the utterly impossible; and in using it Jesus would convey the impression that it was utterly impossible for a rich man to enter heaven, as indeed what follows shows he meant to convey by it. Perhaps rich Christians may derive a little comfort from the fact that a little further on we meet with a rich disciple of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, in whose case denudation does not appear to have been insisted on. Still we cannot feel sure that he did not, like the other early Christians, eventually sell all he had and thus free himself for heaven.

That riches are a danger, an obstacle, a detriment, in short a curse to the possessors of them, is one of the most prominent and repeated doctrines of Jesus. There was nothing new in this idea. The holiness and blessedness of poverty, and the temptations and evils of riches, both in their sentimental and practical aspects, were amongst the most ancient of teachings.

How entirely these ideas have been reversed in modern times we all know well. Thrift and the pursuit of wealth have been praised by moralists and economists as not only good in themselves to the individual, but also as tending to the good of society generally. Wealth is honoured, and the desire to get on in the world by its acquisition is probably the most extensively animating force in modern society. On the other hand, the supposed benefits and blessings of penury, poverty, and asceticism now afford an invariable topic of derision.

And yet though we substantially concur in these modern views and regard material welfare in all its better forms as a worthy object of human pursuit, we cannot help thinking that in modern communities there has been and is much running into the opposite extreme of great exaggeration of the real value of wealth, and of its happiness-giving capabilities. After a very moderate limit is reached the comfort and pleasure-giving capacity of wealth palpably ceases, and its only further power is the ignoble gratifying of vanity and ostentation. The best observers in all ages have recorded their convictions that the rich are not happier

than others; and we do not suppose that anyone now believes that millionaires and rich people generally live really happier lives than most men. The race for wealth so characteristic of modern society is, after a reasonable point is reached, pursued at the cost and sacrifice of much better and worthier ends. And the monstrous colossal accumulations in individual hands which the present industrial arrangements enable are an odious spectacle, especially as we think of the wants of others; a spectacle which we are persuaded the more rational society of the future will no longer tolerate.

Hence, though in a different sense, and on different grounds, many who are no levellers, no anarchists and no pietists agree with Jesus that exorbitant riches are no blessing but a hindrance to their owners. After a certain point, riches cease to truly enrich, and become an influence not for good but for evil.

It is not easy to see the point or the bearing either of the disciples' amazement or of their question. Rich men are an extremely small minority in any community; and their eternal loss, though of course to be regretted, would scarcely be felt numerically. We do not think any of these disciples had much ground for personal alarm on the score of being rich.

At the same time "a rich man" is a very relative phrase, and may be in a measure applied to not only those who have "great possessions," but to those who have lesser stores of worldly goods. The subsequent action of these disciples and the first Christians generally in baring themselves of these incumbrances altogether, would seem to show that they regarded the retention of worldly possessions in any degree as a soul-perilling thing. "Who then can be saved?"

To this question Jesus returned a memorable and most suggestive reply; a reply so comprehensive as to literally comprehend all things in its sweep. "With God all things are possible." With this grand resource difficulties cease; indeed, there are no such things. To that sovereign potency there are not, and never were, such things as impossibilities. The proposition here laid down is one that covers anything and everything.

"But Jesus beheld them." It is not clear what Matthew meant to convey by this. Many commentators think that Jesus gave the disciples a glance so searching and profound as to have greatly

25 When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

impressed itself on Matthew's recollection, but that he did not feel his descriptive powers, which were certainly not great, equal to more than the mere mention of it. Some of these commentators thereupon proceed to try their own descriptive powers upon that divine look, with very lamentable results.

"With men this is impossible." This, we presume, must be taken as a specific answer to the question, "Who then can be saved?" though, so taken, it does not seem very harmonious with what preceded touching the enabling power of the observance of five or six given commandments to "enter into life," if entering into life and being saved are one and the same thing. The variety of names for, and the number of alternative designations of, what are presumably the same things in these Gospels are something amazing and bewildering, and certainly not reassuring. With the question of man's power to "save" himself thus raised, and all those famous collateral issues of justification by works, justification by faith, imputed righteousness, and many others connected therewith, we are not competent to deal. They must be left to those learned and profound theologians who are alone fitted to grapple with them.

How many other things besides his salvation are impossible with man, we only know too well. We are all painfully cognizant of the limits of human power. Though we are made in God's image, our resemblance to him on this head, however it may be in other points, is infinitesimal. We feel to be mere nothings as we think of the forces in the Universe around us; and the making of such diminutive, such microscopic creatures as we are in the divine "image" seems amazing to us. "God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness." When we think of the minute scale upon which our human copy of the divine original is made, the act has the look of a bit of divine banter.

In contrast to the impossibilities of man Jesus makes his memorable declaration that with himself "all things are possible." Those pious philosophers who have reverently asserted impossibilities of God; who have alleged that even he cannot make twice one equal three, cannot make a thing to be and not to be at the same time, cannot make right into wrong or wrong into right, have clearly lapsed into heresy. With God, as we here see, there are no impossibilities. Hence, putting a camel through the eye of a needle, or the still harder task of getting a rich man into heaven, though

human impossibilities, are not even difficulties to Jehovah. And indeed what are such feats, or even the supposed impossibilities named by philosophers, when compared with taking from him that hath not that which he hath, an achievement which Jesus more than once declared should be accomplished ?

In this matter, Reader, we have no option but to declare, in spite of this verse, that we agree with the philosophers we have named. Our conviction is unshakable, that in a contest with any of the impossibilities they name, Jehovah would be worsted.

Unhappily, the theory of God's omnipotence is surrounded with difficulties of a moral kind far greater even than any intellectual ones. How a good Being possessed of omnipotence could ever make, ever even permit, the momentary existence of a world like this is a problem that has ever been the despair of those who have nominally accepted the proposition. To us the thesis is unthinkable; the factors of the proposition—as in the case of any other proposition of a self-stultifying nature—will not mentally cohere even momentarily.

Led on by the preceding conversation, Peter now made a most significant statement, blurted out a deep truth.

27 ¶ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore ?

Behold, he said to Jesus, "We have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore ?"

Yes, Reader, religious sacrifice and religious heroism are here laid bare, and appear before us in their true colours. That famous Piety which has assumed in the world so many guises, and put on so many draperies, is here seen unadorned; seen in all its native loveliness.

Religious sacrifice! Why, to be crushed by any of the religious Juggernauts is a transaction that pays fabulously. If the heavenly side of the bargain is only carried out, religious sacrifice is an investment that pays enormous interest. But where is the sacrifice ?

What affinity there can be between real self-sacrifice and the vulgar, mercenary self-seeking here owned to by Peter is inconceivable. The sacrifice of a mother for her child, of a brave soldier for his comrade, of a fireman on a burning pile, is clear enough. But what there is of the nature of self-sacrifice in selling all we have to buy treasure in heaven is not perceptible. Except, of course, in the uncertainty which may be felt regarding the security

of that heavenly treasure. There, and there alone, is the only element of sacrifice in such a transaction. Want of security ever sadly, but very justly, affects the purchase price. The extreme, the carefully measured, mildness of religious sacrifice in these latter ages, observable in connection with every creed, is eminently suggestive.

“We have forsaken all.” We do not think that in any one of the twelve cases here spoken of the wrench on the score of “possessions” was a very severe one. We have, however, a strong impression that in the case of Peter, however it may have been with the others, a wife was included in the “all” thus forsaken. For in the reply given to Peter’s declaration by Jesus, wives are specially mentioned amongst the things the forsaking of which for “my name’s sake” is lauded and promised to be re-imbursed an hundred fold.

“What shall we have therefore?” Surely, Reader, these men had already been prodigiously repaid for the services they had rendered. They had received the power to heal the sick, cast devils, and raise the dead, and to work miracles broadcast. To Peter personally had been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven itself, or at any rate the promise of them; and to all the twelve had been given the enormous power to bind and loose all things whatsoever on earth. Such colossal rewards for such small services would surely seem sufficient payment. But more was expected. Spiritual avarice seems to have the insatiable nature of other forms of greed. How alike human passions are whatever may be the object on which they are bestowed!

It is regrettable indeed to find the answer here returned by Jesus to the question put to him in the foregoing verse; for it is an answer on a level in every respect with the coarse inquiry to which it is a reply. “What are we to have?” In reply Jesus assures these twelve heroes that they are to sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel; the date of that event being in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory.

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,

How far these insipidities pleased the twelve; how far the prospect thus held out to their ambition delighted them cannot be ascertained. How, except as a possible gratification of personal

vanity, any sane human being could possibly find cause of sensible rejoicing in such an allurements is a mystery. The Prophet of Mecca gave his immediate adherents many promises of this type ; it was, indeed, a common practice of religious founders. Their immediate personal followers were always to be mighty personages ; though, whatever we may think of these founders themselves, their first adherents seem, as we have already observed, in every ascertainable case, to have been very ordinary specimens of our race.

"In the regeneration." A new term, to which even theologians own their inability to assign any certain meaning ; a fresh addition to, another enrichment of, the already copious list of Gospel ambiguities. Of this "regeneration" we cannot even gather whether it is a now past, or a still future event. Nor does the context aid us ; for the sitting of the Son of Man "in the throne of his glory" is presumably a perennial occurrence. Whether the twelve are now sitting on these twelve thrones, or the arrangement has not yet come into force, is a question that shares the uncertainty which overhangs the present state of all our departed. Whether judgment has already taken place, and the Christian heaven and hell are now in full operation ; or those institutions will only commence after the great judgment day still to come, are alternatives from which these Gospels kindly enable readers to make a choice. No religious founder ever took the trouble to be even moderately consistent. Hence the creeds are split up into sects and cults whose antagonisms may each triumphantly point to its justification.

"Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Was this judgment of an Israelitish tribe by one of these individual apostles its final judgment ? Was the eternal fate of these people to be determined by the mere dictum of one of the twelve ? Or was this simply a sort of preliminary judgment, to be revised by Jehovah himself ? Reader, let us hope the latter may be the case. For bad enough, and mean enough, as are all the many judgment days with which the human race is threatened, it will be some consolation to be sentenced by the sovereign potentate himself, rather than by those under-strappers, who when here were not worthy to unloose the shoes of many they are to adjudicate upon.

It is obvious that judging a Jewish tribe will not find these twelve permanent employment ; what is to follow on the completion of that task is not disclosed. Nor does it appear at all whether the arrangement here sketched is to be in any shape

applied to the Gentiles. That eminent Gentile saints will sit upon thrones judging the various sections of the "heathen" may seem a natural, but is a highly precarious, inference. We cannot hope that the same honour will be shown to Gentile dogs as to the children of the kingdom. If in the twelve tribes are to be included the children of Israel who have lived since the time of these apostles judging them will be a most mournful occupation; indeed anything less in the nature of a reward than judging a tribe of Israel at any period of its history it would not be easy to picture.

This verse raises once more an old difficulty which is attached to other promises of Jesus to these twelve men. One of the twelve here promised was the traitor. The fulfilment of the promise after what took place later on, and of which Jesus was of course quite aware when this promise was given, raises a problem we shall not attempt to deal with. Many of the gifts bestowed upon Judas are singular enough to reflect upon. Still there could, of course, be no objection, for example, to his healing the sick, casting devils! and raising the dead, along with the other apostles. But his occupancy of a throne in heaven and his judging a tribe of Israel are not to be entertained.

Let us hope that this awkward promise may not be regarded by Jesus in the light Jephthah and—as we have seen a little while back—Herod regarded their promises. Let us hope the tribe, rather than the traitor, will be regarded when this delicate matter comes to be adjusted.

Having answered the question "What shall we have?" so far

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

as these twelve apostles were personally concerned, Jesus proceeds to lay down a general rule as regards the re-imbursement of the "sacrifices" made by his followers generally. It is a clear, precise, simple, and uniform rule. For sacrifices of various kinds made for his

"name's sake" the payment is as follows: In this present world a hundredfold, and in the next world everlasting life. It must be admitted these are most liberal, nay, most magnificent terms.

Who would not be a Christian on such terms as these? How can men help closing with such a bargain? And yet the fact stares us in the face that extremely few are prepared to forsake the things mentioned in this verse even on the terms here offered by Jesus. Men generally decline to invest in the purchase

of these celestial promissory notes. How is this to be explained? There is one simple explanation which there are the gravest reasons for fearing is the true one. From much that appears in these Gospels it would seem that to become Christians does not rest with ourselves. It is all pre-arranged and unalterably fore-ordained according to a system of election, the principle of which is entirely undiscoverable by us.

If we do not adopt that theory, but hold that Christianity is open to every man's acceptance, how is the general non-acceptance of such splendid terms as Jesus here holds out to be accounted for? A hundredfold in this life, and everlasting life hereafter! If these conditions will not tempt men to be Christians, we wonder what would. Reader, is it not but too clear, that it is not the insufficiency of these conditions, which are, indeed, overflowingly lavish, but the painful insecurity thereof, that causes so few to embrace them? Are not such terms indeed painfully suggestive of a want of security?

But in what sense are we to understand the statement that "sacrifices" for Christ's sake are repaid a hundredfold in this world; "now in this time," as the next Gospel puts it; "in this present time," as given in the third? Everlasting life is a promise that of course lies entirely beyond any possibility of being traced or examined, and must be taken on trust. But the assertion that sacrifices for Jesus' sake are repaid here at the rate of a hundred times the amount sacrificed, must surely, if true, be verifiable. Then where are we to find the evidences of this fact?

It is manifest that the re-imbursement in question takes place in no literal, indeed in no outward or visible shape which can be traced. This hundredfold requital must therefore take place in the personal consciousness of Christian believers; in other words, they must be extremely happy.

How far this is true can, of course, be known only to believers themselves; but the evidences of it are singularly wanting. The usual tenour of Christian writings is rather to picture this world as a vale of tears, in which the Christian life is an arduous struggle with trials, temptations, and sorrows, to be recompensed hereafter. But if the Christian life here be a very happy one, such representations of it as we usually meet with are sheer cant, and one of the worst types of that obnoxious article. The Christians known

to us are not apparently either happier or unhappier than other men; indeed we are quite unable to discover any distinguishing marks of any kind between the elect and non-elect.

Paul tells us that if Christians have hope in this world only they are of all men most miserable, thus showing us that it is the prospect of heaven, and that alone, that sustains them. And certainly all the memoirs of eminent Christians we have come across record how the heavenly hope was their one sheet anchor amid the trials and sorrows of this life.

The fact is that Christianity shows us the same inconsistent medley on this matter it displays on so many others. The Christian life is portrayed as a hard and as a pleasant one; and as with the older conflicting notions that the righteous do best in this world, and that it is the wicked who flourish here, the two ideas are played fast and loose with according to convenience.

The only conceivable way in which Christian sacrifices are repaid a hundred times in this world is that the prospect of Paradise suffuses a delightful joy upon believers even here and renders the Christian life very happy in this world even. But if that be so, it is quite time for Christians to cease talking of the misery of this present world so far as they are concerned.

When belief reaches a sufficient degree of intensity, the feeling of a coming Paradise must be exhilarating. The pious Moslem who spreads his carpet at the hour of prayer, and with upturned eyes thinks of the heavenly joys awaiting him, is clearly entranced—for the time being, at any rate. And cruel would be the attempt to undeceive him; vain, however, as cruel.

Yet surely even the raptures of piety must be sadly blighted if the devotee should bethink him how comparatively few are those who will share his heaven with him; and what a fearful destiny awaits all besides. And surely even the most ardent saint must sometimes think what a strange "heavenly father" he is putting his trust in.

And now, Reader, what are the sacrifices, the forsakings, mentioned by Jesus, which are to be thus prodigiously remunerated both here and hereafter? This is the list. Houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, and lands. What a droll anti-climax that last item of "lands" feels to be!

Taking the first and last items in this list—houses and lands—together, the forsaking of these, if the act affects the individual

himself only and not others justly dependent upon him, is entirely justifiable. The forsaking and realizing of houses and lands by the apostles and first Christians were unflinching and absolute, as we see from the frightful punishment inflicted in an attempted case of partial forsaking only. How these denuded believers supported themselves after the joint fund was exhausted, as it soon would be, there is nothing to show us.

In these latter ages the forsaking of lands and houses by Christian believers is practised upon a most modest, a most mild scale. It is true that from time to time some pious believer builds a church; but it is usually out of wealth so great as to make the munificence of the act seem painfully measured. And probably it is yet as it was in Jesus' own day. The greatest real religious sacrifice is to be seen in the poor woman who drops her hardly saved shilling into the prosaic-looking box at the sanctuary door, or pinches herself to pay for pathetic masses for the repose of some beloved soul.

"Or brethren or sisters." The justifiableness of forsaking brothers and sisters obviously depends upon the particular circumstances of the case. In most cases it would be quite allowable. But in many, such as the forsaking by an elder brother or sister of younger ones not able to take care of themselves, the act for whose "name's sake" it may be done, is a flagrant dereliction of duty.

"Or father or mother." Here again the nature of this act entirely depends upon the special circumstances of the case. The forsaking of parents may be allowable under certain conditions; under others, it may be a repulsive violation of duty and affection.

And here we may remark that the forsaking of father or mother, or brothers or sisters, in the cases where the act is justifiable, is not a very great sacrifice; indeed it is, and rightly, an act of daily occurrence from purposes of an entirely non-religious kind. To promise a hundredfold reward for such an act when done from religious motives seems, to say the least, a very preposterous recompense. To repay a hundredfold the forsaking of father, mother, brothers, or sisters in cases where the act is a wrong, would be eminently shameful.

"Or wife or children." We are sorry indeed, Reader, to have to comment upon this, and we do so with very painful feelings. It is seldom that anything is wisely said or written under the influence

of anger and indignation; and yet who can think of what we here find without those feelings welling up?

The forsaking of wife and children, taken in all its bearings, is probably the heaviest crime a man can commit. If it be possible to add a shade of darkness to a deed so black, it is to do the deed under pretence of religious enthusiasm. And the praise, sanction, and encouragement to such a course here given by Jesus, are, in our judgment, one of the very worst things anywhere to be found.

With the object of extricating Jesus from the sanction and praise here awarded to the abandonment of wife and children for his name's sake, some commentators pretend that the word forsake means not to have; that to forsake wife and children simply means not to have any—to remain celibate. Probably this is thought to be a very smart exegesis. We do not know if these brilliant expositors ask us to apply this very peculiar “meaning” of the word forsake to brothers and sisters, and father and mother also; and that Jesus recommended our not having any. They might just as well.

Lucidity was certainly not a strong point with the Prophet of Nazareth, as the disastrous strifes and grave antagonisms in the household of faith regarding the meanings of what he said only too plainly show us. But theologians often unwarrantably exaggerate this fact, and try to throw doubts upon the meanings of some of Jesus' statements that are entirely uncalled for. If Jesus had meant to recommend remaining unmarried—a not very original, indeed even then a very antiquated piece of advice—there is no reason to doubt that he would have plainly said so.

30 But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

This verse evidently belongs not to what here precedes it, but to what follows it in the next chapter, where we find a long parable in illustration of it.

MATTHEW XX.

FOR the purpose of again showing them what the kingdom of heaven is like unto, Jesus now gives the disciples a long parable; a parable of which we are sorry to have to say that its moral is not a good one.

CHAPTER XX.

1 *Christ by the similitude of the labourers in the vineyard, sheweth that God is debtor unto no man: 17 fore-*

*telleth his passion:
20 by answering the
mother of Zebedee's
children teacheth his
disciples to be lowly:
30 and giveth two
blind men their sight.*

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

4 And said unto them: Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

A householder goes out in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard, and agrees to give them a penny for the day. Three hours later he hires more, but without any agreement as to wages. At noon he hires others in the same manner, and again in the middle of the afternoon others also. Finally at the eleventh hour, when only one hour remained for work, he went and hired a further number. At the close of the day's work, all these various labourers were called together and were every-one paid exactly the same wages. Those who had worked all day; those who had worked three-fourths of the day; those who had worked half the day; those who had worked a fourth of the day; and those who had only worked one hour, received precisely the same payment for their labour.

No doubt all these labourers were much astonished at so extraordinary a scale of payment; but the latter lots, having no personal reason for demurring to this peculiar system of payment, are not made to say anything, though if they were fair-minded men they must have strongly felt the inequity of the proceedings. Those who had worked all day murmured strongly, and protested against so invidious and so inequitable an act.

In reply to these complaints, the householder offered no reasons for his singular conduct; but justified himself solely on the ground of his right to do what he liked with his own.

An ignoble, unworthy parable, Reader; one that in its small way strikes at the root of all human effort and all human endeavour. There is small incentive to begin work in the morning, if the reward is no greater than for beginning it at mid-day or even at the last hour. If the remuneration for a day's labour be but the same as for an hour's labour, what conceivable reason is there for toiling all day? More demoralizing, anarchical teaching than that inculcated in this parable cannot be thought of.

An employer of labour who should now carry out this parable—if it be possible to picture a sane person attempting anything so

inane—and attempt to pay the same wages to men who began work on Monday morning as to those who began on the Friday, would be justly hooted off the ground by his workmen.

Nor does the ground assigned by this householder for his caprice—the right to do what he pleases with his own—mend matters. It is a contention that cannot be admitted. Neither God nor man has the smallest right to use anything whatever unfairly or inequitably.

Quite in keeping with the notions of propriety and justice laid down in this parable, the labourers who had worked least were to be not only paid the same as the others, but also paid first. Those who had worked longest had to wait and watch their lucky and less tired comrades receive their money first. It may be that the exigencies of the parable required this little arrangement merely. Be this as it may, the incident is quite in harmony with the “moral” of the parable.

It is hardly necessary to dwell upon the economic aspect of these parables. To draw a pen through debts of £2,500,000, and to pay a full day's wage for an hour's work, are proceedings that soon come to an end. They are freaks that may be indulged in, but cannot be continued. We live in a world in which quixotism soon comes to a full stop.

Having seen the other labourers dealt with in what seemed a very liberal manner, these all-day labourers naturally thought this householder a very generous man, who would no doubt deal with them in a like spirit, and add a bonus to their contract price. But they were disappointed. This householder proved to be simply a capricious employer in whom all ideas of proportion were absent. Their day's work being set down as of no more value than the other labourers' work of an hour, naturally caused the feelings of the all-day labourers to well up and vent themselves in murmurs. The slight thus placed upon the relative quality and value of their work would also naturally stir some resentment.

In reply to these murmurs and remonstrances, the householder

13 But he answered reminds them of their contract. But these all-

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house.

12 Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny?

day workers had not alleged any legal claim to more than their penny. It was the spectacle of other men receiving the same wages for one-half or even one-tenth part of the labour they had given that so wounded them.

And precisely the same complaint might have been made by the three-fourths and half-day labourers. They had gone into the vineyard without any contract; but with the understanding given by the householder that they would be paid "whatsoever is right." When they witnessed men who had worked a fourth of the day only, and even men who had worked but an hour, receive for their services the same payment as that received by themselves for three times the labour, could they think it "right"? Was it possible for anyone to regard such conduct as fair dealing? There was no plea of contract here. This householder had promised to do what was right; and his ideas thereof had just been illustrated. A more open and aggravated flouting of all notions of fairness and equity could not be thought of than was contained in this householder's proceedings.

Abandoning any further attempt to give reasons for or justify his unworthy conduct, the householder falls back upon his imaginary right to do what he likes in such things; and putting on very lordly airs, says, "Go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee."

14 Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

This demeanour may be all very well, Friend householder. But we live in a world in which even such great folks as vineyard proprietors are not permitted to have quite their own way. It is quite true men may within certain limits do what they like. But then other men will think of them as they like; and will in response do what they like also.

This householder would want labourers another day. Would he be very likely to get these all-day, or even these one-hour labourers into his vineyard early next morning? And would neighbouring vineyard proprietors think this method of paying labourers a very likely one to work well either for themselves or for their whimsical neighbour? Was it a promising way to raise the standard and efficiency of labour? Probably these neighbours would show their disapprobation in some effective way. It would, however, not be really required. The erratic householder would very speedily meet his own Nemesis.

If we take this householder's conduct as a general principle and try to picture his system of wages as adopted or attempted generally, the whole thing is too brimful of sheer absurdity, and cannot even be provisionally entertained.

But this householder is not content with asserting his right to do as he pleases: he goes on to reproach and asperse these all-day labourers. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" An evil eye is an expression whose precise meaning we shall not try to ascertain; it is here evidently intended as a severe reproach.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

"Because I am good." Good men are not much given to proclaiming their goodness. And this householder's opinion of himself was not likely to be shared, either by these labourers, or by anyone else. The assertion "I am good" is exactly begging the whole question. Is a man good who acts in the fashion of this householder? The answer to this question might safely be left with those very over-paid and favoured one-hour labourers themselves, who, if honest men, would answer with an emphatic No.

There are many very singular "because" in these Gospels, but it would not be easy to find a more eccentric one than this.

The first clause of this verse is the kernel of this parable. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" A question to which we give a decided and unhesitating No. It is not lawful and it is not right for a man to do what he likes with his own. In all civilized countries there are limits by law, and everywhere exist limits in equity to what a man may do with his own.

A man has no right whatever to destroy, to misuse, or even to unfairly use his own property. One who destroys or injuriously uses his own goods is dealt with by the law. And a man who unjustly or unfairly uses or disposes of his property, if not amenable to law, is amenable to the reprobation and, if need be, the execration of his fellows. A man who, acting on the unlimited "right" here propounded, should disown his children and give his goods to a stranger would be detested. And a man who, acting upon the principles laid down in this parable to the mild extent of leaving the servant he engaged last week a pension equal to that left to a life-long servant, would be rightly adjudged a fool; a man in whom all notions of justice and proportion were entirely wanting.

The object of this parable is clearly to maintain the doctrine of

a person's unqualified right to do what he likes with his own. This vineyard proprietor had a perfect right to do what he would therein with his own. And the proprietor of the kingdom of heaven has the absolute right to do therein as he wishes. This parable is a defence of pure caprice; a defence of the supposed right of a person to discard all principle in dealing with what he is pleased to call his "own"; an assertion of an unlimited right to do therewith whatever he may choose. A principle which would obviously cover conduct of any kind with one's "own." The true principle is that in dealing with our own we are bound by precisely the same principles of justice and righteousness that bind us in all our other dealings and actions.

Yes, Reader, this is a very bad parable. If an hour's service be worth as much as, and be equally recompensed with, a day's service, all idea of apportionment of reward to work done is entirely undermined. Nor does the contention that to give the hour-labourer a day's wage is simply an act of generosity which in no way impairs the justice done to the day-labourer in the slightest degree avail anything. It is simply putting a gloss upon the transaction which does not alter the facts in the least. For why be generous to the hour man and not to the day man? Why favouritism to the one who had done least, and no generosity to the one who had done most? The inequity precisely consists in the receipt of something unearned in the one case, and not in the other; and the consequent utter distortion of a just and equitable recompense. Besides, as between the half-day labourers who had no contract, but the mere promise to be rightly treated, and the eleventh-hour labourers, where does the "right" dealing come in? There is no excuse of a bargain in their case.

The defence of Jesus from the charge of upholding injustice in this parable has been a favourite undertaking with casuists and commentators. Subtleties and ingenuities have been copiously lavished upon this parable. Some of these efforts are well worth reading as intellectual feats. They are like the defences of guilty men made by famous barristers. We greatly doubt if these latter ever diverted a juryman from his duty; and we much doubt if the defences of this parable ever caused a single reader to feel its moral to be a just one. Such efforts never are and never can be a success. Moral alchemy is as hopeless as the physical. Not until the human mind and human heart alike undergo a fundamental

change can the doctrine of this parable be reconciled with our feelings and convictions of true equity. To give to him who has laboured but an hour the same as to him who has laboured all day—be the name and the form of the deed what they may—is as unjust as it is demoralizing.

Of the spiritual application of this parable we need say little. “For the kingdom of heaven is like unto” the householder in question. We have had no great opinion of this kingdom all along; but must own our surprise and regret to find that it will be regulated and governed on no more elevated principles than those declared in this parable. That the king of heaven will act as this householder acted, and pay all his workers equally is the spiritual lesson here set forth.

It is most amusing to notice how theologians try to escape from this latter deduction. That all Christians will be rewarded equally is a form of justice they do not seem to relish. They are prepared to defend the system of equal payment for widely different services as applied to labourers in a vineyard. But the same fate in the kingdom of heaven for great saints and small ones is not to their liking; and their attempts to wriggle out of that manifest lesson of this parable are most diverting.

It would seem from the first part of this verse that the spirit of this parable will be carried still further, and those who have laboured least will be placed even before those who have laboured more; a fitting culmination to the teaching here proclaimed.

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

“For many be called, but few chosen.” We shall find this phrase repeated by Jesus at the end of another parable a little further on; from which we naturally suppose he considered it a statement of importance. And yet any attempt to define what is meant by “called” and what by “chosen” is entirely vain, as the very diverse interpretations of theologians show us. The phrase contains no distinct meaning that we can call certain or even highly probable. If we take the two words in their most natural sense it would seem that Jesus summons or calls “many” to the kingdom of heaven, but selects few only of those thus bidden. It is not clear whether all who are called obey the summons and the chosen few are picked out and the rest rejected; or whether of those called many disobey the summons. It hardly looks as though

Jesus would call those whom he foreknew would not respond; and yet why call so many, and yet choose so few of them! It certainly seems preferable not to be called at all, rather than be called and then not chosen. The subject evidently leads those who may follow it into the ancient free-grace-election quagmire. A remark or two upon the chosen few and the fewness thereof from an outside point of view are all we wish to say.

The fewness of those who respond to the call of any given religion is a very obvious fact. The true believers in any given creed are a select few. Even where a given creed is known and nominally prevails, those who in any practical sense comply or attempt to comply with it are a very small band, a mere batch of humanity, whose proportion to our total species would make us weep if the ridiculous aspect of the spectacle did not overcome all others.

“But few chosen.” The Christian system makes the same confusion of its doctrines on this head as other religions do; and they are driven to it by the necessities of their position. Every religion professes in some shape to offer itself—is indeed manifestly constrained by decency to offer itself—to all men. Accordingly every religion tenders itself, nominally at least, for the acceptance of all men; and—in this particular context—alleges that every man may embrace it if he will.

Every religious founder met with but few adherents in his own lifetime; an *élite* few invariably declared to be chosen vessels, elected saints, pre-ordained by heaven. On the other hand, every religious founder was rejected by the vast bulk of those who saw and knew him. How was this portentous fact to be explained? By owning that most men were unable to see either the merits or the truth of the new system; that they had weighed it and found it wanting; or that they did not think it worth the weighing even? This would never do. Hence this vast non-believing majority are declared to be the “world”; they are vessels of wrath; blind or blinded; they hear but do not understand; see but perceive not. And this obtuseness is represented sometimes as wilful, sometimes as insurmountable, according to the immediate purpose in hand. This is not satisfactory. But what else was possible?

“But few chosen.” “Few there be that find it.” Such, Reader, are the mournful declarations of the “Saviour” of the world.

Once again, whilst on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus informs

17 ¶ And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,

18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

the twelve of his approaching fate; giving, in this case, a number of additional and precise details. The chief priests and Scribes were to condemn him to death and to deliver him to the Gentiles; and these latter were to mock, scourge, and crucify him. In the two following Gospels, even the spitting upon him is added to the prediction here made by Jesus; from which we see how clear and circumstantial this prediction was. We thus see, Reader,

how extremely precise, definite, and intelligible prophecy could sometimes be. What a pity it was not always or even usually so! If Esaias had only spoken in this clear way, how much better it would surely have been.

It is quite true, no doubt, that this narrative was not written until many years after the events here predicted by Jesus had occurred—as regards the rising again, actually or presumably occurred. And there are never wanting sceptics with their ungenerous insinuations on such points. Vagueness is so distressing and confusing, and definiteness so refreshing, that we do not hesitate to pronounce this prediction of Jesus—so different from prophecy generally and from many of his own prophecies also—the worthiest and most straightforward prophecy ever made.

For ourselves, as we have already observed, we find no difficulty whatever, even from a purely natural standpoint, in believing that Jesus foresaw and announced his death to the disciples; and even foresaw some of the features of the event. The difficulty to us would be to think how he could possibly fail to do so. If he persisted in going to Jerusalem and proclaiming the new faith there, the outcome was quite certain.

The resurrection on the third day is, of course, an item of an entirely different kind. The conduct of these disciples at the time of that event, and the flat contradiction given by John in his Gospel of the alleged foreknowledge of that event by the disciples, are curious and significant comments upon the repeated predictions of Jesus' resurrection found in this Gospel.

Theologians often remind us that Scripture statements and passages require to be taken in "conjunction" with each other; need to be "read in the light of" each other. There are however many things in these Gospels with which such a course is not advisable.

The two genealogies and the four resurrection accounts for example, cannot be read in the light of or in conjunction with each other with any degree of satisfaction. They are indeed—as is usually done by Christians—much better read separately, and at suitable intervals. But anyone studying these Gospels in detail is often compelled to make a choice—as in the extraordinarily inter-mixed chronological arrangement of events, for example—between the various accounts tendered to us. So also in the case of conflicting statements. In the instance now before us, that of the alleged pre-knowledge of the resurrection possessed by the disciples at the time of the occurrence, we accept the statement of John in preference to this of Matthew. John, as we know, ranked higher and was more intimate with Jesus than Matthew, and his declaration therefore seems entitled to greater weight. Besides it has also the appearance of much greater probability.

So far as can be made out from our author's peculiar mode of narration, the occurrence he records in this and the following eight verses took place at Jericho. When we remember that that place is some eighteen miles only from Jerusalem, we cannot help feeling some surprise at meeting with "the mother of Zebedee's children" so far away from Galilee. When we call to mind how her husband, as Zebedee doubtless was, and their two sons were found by Jesus whilst they were fishing on the Lake of Galilee, it is evident that the family lived in the neighbourhood of that lake. It would almost appear from this incident that Zebedee's wife had accompanied Jesus and her two sons on this sad march to Jerusalem; an expedition that does not seem very appropriate to an aged woman in those days.

This anecdote is not a pleasant one in any sense. Maternal affection is indeed always admirable; but maternal solicitude, when bestowed upon middle-aged sons, is apt to become very droll if not exercised with much tact. The spectacle of James and John bringing their mother to plead with Jesus for a favour of so extremely selfish and invidious a kind is very repugnant, and gives us a very poor opinion of these two brothers. For we see from the account given of the occurrence in the next Gospel, where these two make the request themselves to Jesus, and where their mother is not named, and also from the indignation of their co-apostles, how this act was entirely the work of these two brothers themselves, and cannot,

20 † Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

except in a very subordinate sense, be ascribed to a mother's fondness. The unselfishness of the mother in not beseeching Jesus for any place for herself is deserving of recognition.

Jesus asked the woman what was the favour she begged. To which she replied that she begged for her two sons the two best and chief seats in Jesus' kingdom; that they might sit next to himself, one on his right, the other on his left, in the kingdom of heaven.

21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

What a very singular sensation it must have been to converse with a person really believed to possess such a power! It feels very strange, Reader, to reflect that in those days men and women talked with the Second Person of the Trinity; argued with him; said severe things even to him; and got severe things said in return. What a strange thing it must have been to look our Creator in the face, to gaze into that pair of eyes, and hear that celestial voice! And yet how few of those who enjoyed those marvellous privileges seem to have been impressed with them! So complete was Jesus' human disguise that no one in Nazareth during all the years he lived there seems ever to have suspected anything unusual in him; not his own brothers and sisters even.

And when he publicly declared himself at Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and elsewhere, the same result or want of result followed. People were not impressed; as we so painfully see from the declared intention of Jesus to impress the peoples of those places in quite another way later on. Nor was the result any better in that Jerusalem to which Jesus was now approaching.

It seems portentous indeed to think that of the many who saw and conversed with our Creator whilst on earth, so few seem to have felt impressed or moved with the extraordinary privilege. Need we wonder that there have ever been backsliders from other leaders, when we find that of those who had walked with our Creator himself many walked with him no more?

We should not, Reader, be faithful to the purpose of this work if we did not honestly state that we can feel no real surprise that men generally were so little impressed with what the Prophet of Nazareth said to them; and that many walked with him no more who had once done so. Had you and we, Reader, been listeners to what Jesus of Nazareth said as recorded in

these Gospels, we are satisfied that we should never have thought or suspected that the sayings proceeded from any but a fellow-mortal. Nay, we are quite certain we should have felt imperatively called upon to protest against and traverse a great deal of what we heard. And we are quite certain that when we heard of the furnace of fire in store for all but a "few," we should, at whatever cost, have even ventured to say a few extremely plain words.

But it must, as we have remarked, have been a singular feeling to accost a person even believed to possess the powers here ascribed to Jesus, if the degree of faith therein were at all strong.

Jesus very appropriately addressed his answer to the mother's request to her sons. "Ye know not what ye ask." Very probably they had not thought out all that the request involved. Still it ought to be remembered what colossal and unlimited promises Jesus had made to these men; and the two chief seats in heaven would no doubt seem very tempting to them.

Proceeding with his reply, Jesus gives what must have seemed an unexpected turn thereto by asking these brothers if they are able to drink of the cup he himself was to drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism he was already baptized with.

We have already seen how Jesus could be astonished and "marvel" at things. We have no manner of doubt that he marvelled at the reply to his question made by these ambitious brothers. "We are able!"

Judging from his letter that we have, and other indications, James seems to have been a rather modest man, though Jesus had surnamed him son of thunder. The author of the fourth Gospel and of the Book of Revelation, however, had a most excellent opinion of himself, and doubtless thought that one of the seats in question could not possibly be better filled than in the way he suggested.

"We are able." It is not so much the mere boastfulness and conceit of this answer which surprises us as the presumptuous leveling of themselves with the Master it implies. These brothers felt able to drink anything Jesus could drink, and to be equal to any baptism he was equal to. And they evidently felt themselves quite suitable persons to fill the two chief places of honour in heaven itself.

We may just here observe how entirely absent in the first disciples and followers of Jesus were the more modern forms of piety and saintism which consist in proclamations of unworthiness; professions of being worms and vile creatures unfit for mercy; lamentations and bewailings of real or imaginary sins; and protestations of unworthiness to a seat in heaven of any kind. Not that we regret such absence; these pietisms have long been appraised at their real value. We simply point out that they are a later evolution, and eminently un-apostolic.

The rejoinder made by Jesus to this, "we are able," is most disappointing. No doubt the reply of these brothers was a very awkward and puzzling one. But if ever a piece of presumption deserved rebuking it was this. If ever a severe and crushing rejoinder was called for, it was here.

23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Instead of that Jesus accepts the answer. There was nothing in his cup and in his baptism these two disciples were not able to endure; and they were to drink and be baptized accordingly. But the seats were not promised after all. Jesus had put what seems a test question to these brothers, and had received an affirmative reply. Still the seats were not bestowed. And the reason given, though very remarkable, must be owned to be valid and conclusive. They were "not mine to give," said Jesus. They were destined for those for whom Jehovah had prepared them. We cannot see why Jesus should not have made this answer at first. Why put the question he did to these brothers? Having got the answer thereto he did, it seems rather unfair to fall back upon the inherent impossibility of compliance.

The reserve displayed in this answer, too, is very noticeable. Jesus, of course, knew quite well who were the two destined occupants of the seats in question; and by leaving the point in ambiguity, John and James might still hope they were the happy pair. Practically, however, Jesus' reply was a refusal of the request.

Few readers of this Gospel will feel much sympathy with these two apostles in their rebuff; possibly a little may be spared for the disappointed mother. The intensely self-seeking nature of religious faith and religious sacrifice is well enough known, and receives

here a striking illustration in what we suppose may be regarded as the highest quarters.

And really it would seem that religious pride, like worldly pride, can never be satiated. Just think what these two brothers had already received. Long ago they had acquired the power to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils, and work miracles at pleasure. Then the power to loose and to bind everything whatever upon our planet had been conferred upon them. And quite recently they had been promised a throne each in heaven from which they were to judge a tribe of Israel, which thrones were to be placed around Jesus' own throne. What more could they want; what more indeed could Jesus give or promise them? Still they were not satisfied; they wished their vanity gratified by being placed over the heads of everyone else.

Upon the declared inability or limited power set forth by Jesus in this answer little need be said. It is but one of many like instances. At the end of this Gospel, in the very last thing recorded of Jesus, we find him saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Those who are interested in reconciling such statements may deal with them as they please. It is evident enough that the word omnipotence is only another name for absolute nonsense.

It is not quite evident whether the ten were present when the two sons of thunder and their mother made the preceding request, or the fact came to their knowledge afterwards. Matthew assures us that he and his colleagues felt indignant against the two brethren. It almost seems that the thirty years which intervened, according to the usual estimate, between this incident and the writing of this Gospel had not altogether extinguished Matthew's indignation; otherwise he would surely not have preserved this meagre anecdote. John judiciously omits it from his own Gospel.

24 And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Knowing the irritation felt against the two by the other ten apostles, Jesus called them unto him; by "them" presumably the whole twelve are meant to be understood. Having called them, Jesus reminds them how amongst the Gentiles princes and great personages exercise dominion and authority over the rest. Why are the Gentiles

25 But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

here singled out for this reference? The Jews had surely as many princes and authorities—and sorry specimens as we see they were—amongst them as any other peoples, besides the general superintendence of the Romans. These Gentiles were not to be imitated in anything.

So far as these sentiments may be considered an encouragement to genuine modesty and considerate behaviour to others they are most excellent; and if all men would practice them to a proper degree the result would be a very happy one. We ought all to be modest; but our next duty is to offer a firm and unflinching opposition to those who are not so. It is of no use good men themselves being modest, if they allow the pretentious and overbearing to have their own way. There has been far too much of the mistaken submissiveness of the good in past times. The desire to be great and to be chiefs in the sense here meant is best extinguished by seeing the hopelessness of getting other men to recognize such claims. The giving way of the good and meritorious to the self-assertive and pretentious is most disastrous in all its bearings. And even where the desire and the claim to be great and chief are honourable and well founded, it is a great mistake to give an exaggerated importance to the possessors of even such real claims. When we remember how often great generals make great blunders; great statesmen false moves; how often great thinkers have defended absurdities; how often true reformers oppose further true reforms; and how in endless other ways genuinely eminent men go wrong, we see how necessary it is not to make too much even of true greatness; how necessary it is for the general good sense of mankind to be constantly exercised.

Modesty all round; a stern resolution to put down pretence of every species; a willingness to recognize all true gifts and eminence; and a determination to give even these latter no more influence than they are strictly entitled to—such are the real duties of all men alike.

By way of example and encouragement Jesus points the apostles to himself as an exemplar in this matter. References to one's self are not felicitous; and in this subordinate sense this precedent of Jesus is not to be commended for use by any-

26 But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister:

27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

one else. From the Christian standpoint this self-pattern may be very admirable; still, as we have repeatedly seen, the example of Jesus is entirely unsuitable in many things for human imitation.

It is only in one very minor way that we are able to perceive in the example of Jesus any encouragement to modesty and humility. For in all essential respects, greater assertion of self, more absolute claims to be chief of everything and everyone could not be imagined than those put forth by Jesus himself. Other religious founders have indeed made very similar, but none such extreme, allegations as those of the Prophet of Nazareth.

Accepting for the moment the Christian hypothesis of Jesus as as an embodied member of the Trinity, it must be owned that the thirty years' obscurity at Nazareth as a Jewish lad, youth and carpenter is an extraordinary instance of modesty; in its outward form at any rate, for of Jesus' personal experiences during that period nothing is known. The whole subject is a mass of mysticism, for the theory of the Trinity implied, of course, his simultaneous presence in heaven during the whole period. Still, his thirty years' life at Nazareth may be taken as an example of self-abnegation and voluntary humiliation in its external form at least. Some few things in his public career may also possibly be placed under the same head; though professions of humility were always, if not accompanied, preceded and followed by great self-assertion.

But upon the whole, more extraordinary putting forward of self; more extreme claims to pre-eminence over everyone else; more severe denunciations of all who refused to recognize those claims; and more extreme and cruel threats of what he would do in another world to all who did not yield to him, than those recorded of Jesus of Nazareth could not be conceived. Christians and non-Christians may take whatever view they may think proper of these things in their major aspects; but in their minor aspect, as an exemplification to men of modesty and reasonableness, we are unable to see in them any real encouragement to those virtues.

How far and in what way ten of these twelve apostles illustrated these self-renouncing injunctions, we cannot say; for little is known of their after history. But in the case of their chief, the founder or supposed founder of that memorable chair of St. Peter which has figured so largely in the world ever since, there are recorded some instances of the exercise of "dominion" and of "authority" that are—well, we will say startling. Of the successors

of these apostles ever since the greatest charity could not assert that they have been distinguished for eschewing that bad example of the Gentiles Jesus here warned the twelve against. Apart from the endless strifes about dominion and authorities in the household of faith itself, resistance to ecclesiastical encroachments is written upon well-nigh every page of history since.

“A ransom for many.” Over this word “many” fierce and, of course, interminable theological battles have been waged ; a fact of which Jesus was, by hypothesis, quite pre-cognizant when he used the term.

“But few chosen” is a text we were discussing but two or three pages back. And if Jesus gave his life a ransom for many, what of the rest ? Putting aside those who lived before Jesus’ advent, the proportion of the human lives that have come into being since then, which has been “ransomed” by Jesus is far better left undwelt upon.

Jericho. Jesus had now reached classic Jewish land. The Galilee where he spent his life was a mongrel borderland, from which he had whilst in his mother’s womb been brought in order to be born on purer soil. At Jericho he was again in the true land of Israel.

29 And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

Fourteen centuries before the visit of Jesus, Jericho had been the scene of some stirring events indeed, compared with which those recorded by Matthew seem altogether trifling. For it was this same Jericho whose walls had fallen down at the blast of Joshua’s trumpet ; and it was not far from Jericho where Joshua had arrested the Moon, and stayed the Sun for a whole day in order the more effectually and completely to dispatch the Canaanites.

It may no doubt justly be pointed out that a little further on in this narrative, the Sun was affected in a peculiar manner also ; though when compared with that of Joshua, a very minor manner.

On the day of Jesus’ death we read, “There was darkness over all the land” from noon until three p.m. But as no one outside Jerusalem observed this fact, the best authorities now regard the occurrence as a local one only. And when we reflect that none of the Romans, Greeks, or other foreign residents in Jerusalem have recorded it ; that it had no effect upon Pilate, the chief priests, or people generally ; that in short it seems to have been known to the

writers of three of these four Gospels alone, it is not improbable that it was a darkness that affected certain individuals only.

But if the wonders now seen at Jericho were small compared

30 ¶ And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.

with those once witnessed there, they were, at any rate, of a great deal pleasanter sort. To restore sight to two beggars is indeed a microscopic feat when compared with arresting the Sun—a body 354,936 times the size of our planet. But the former was a very agreeable

achievement, whereas the latter though a huge was a very odious one. The Sun is, as we know, a remarkably impartial body; as Jesus himself remarked, he shines on the just and the unjust. But in Joshua's time he one day took sides, and took sides, alas! in favour of one of the blackest deeds he ever looked upon.

On the way from Jericho to Bethphage two blind men were sitting by the wayside, and hearing that Jesus was passing, they drew his attention by saluting him as son of David and begging for mercy.

Why the multitude should rebuke these blind men we cannot

31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.

imagine; one would naturally think they would have assisted in attracting Jesus' attention to them. The actions of Gospel multitudes as we have already seen, and as we shall see in Jerusalem later on, are, as a rule, entirely

unintelligible.

The account of the cure of these two blind men is very similar

32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?

33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

34 So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

to that of the cure of the two blind men given in the early part of this Gospel. Both pairs noticeably saluted Jesus by the same title—son of David. In the former case the cure was contingent upon faith; here it seems to have been unconditional.

It must have been a glorious feeling to instantaneously "receive sight." We mean of course in cases of absolute blindness; for amongst so-called "blind" people, and not least amongst the begging ones, a degree, and not seldom a good degree, of sight often exists. But in cases of total blindness, the reception of sight must have been transporting.

"And they followed him." It would have been most interesting to know in what way—how far and how long—these two men followed Jesus. We are sorry and surprised to find no mention of

them in the events that took place immediately afterwards in Jerusalem. In this, however, they but resembled all the other "subjects" of Jesus' miracles. Surely these two men, and the multitude who saw them cured, could not help becoming Christians. We look for a trace of them in vain.

It is very instructive to compare the "parallel" account of this occurrence—and of the preceding incident of Zebedee's sons' request—given in the next Gospel. Such a perusal shows us how impossible it is that accounts so conflicting and mutually exclusive can be accurate; and also shows us that of the many impieties in which piety indulges, few are worse than the ascription of inspiration to contradictory narratives.

Deplorable indeed are the shifts to which commentators resort to "explain" these discrepancies. We are told that Mark did not "notice" the mother of James and John, and hence "made" these two prefer their request themselves; and that his attention was so fixed upon one of these blind men that he left the other out altogether. And these allegations are put forward by men who profess that the pen of Mark was guided by one who cannot "overlook" anything and who notices everything; one who had already guided Matthew's pen in his account of these occurrences! And how could Jesus say, "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" as Matthew states; and "What wilt thou I should do unto thee?" as Mark gives it? It certainly does not matter a great deal whether Jesus cured one man or two; but it matters a great deal to the credibility of witnesses who thus report the event. It does not do to ask men's belief in a miracle upon evidence of a kind which, as has truly been remarked, if brought forward to prove the signature to a will would be at once fatal. The divine guidance of the two pens which wrote these accounts is in truth a very irreverent supposition, and, like so much other "Christianity," has not a vestige of warrant in these accounts themselves.

MATTHEW XXI.

JESUS had now reached the suburbs of Jerusalem. The site of the village of Bethphage is not known. It was evidently close to Mount Olivet, which is some two miles east of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XXI.

1 *Christ rideth into Jerusalem upon an ass, 12 driveth the buyers and sellers out of the temple, 17 curseth the fig tree, 23 putteth to silence the priests and elders, 28 and rebuketh them by the similitude of the two sons, 33 and the husbandmen, who slew such as were sent unto them.*

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

of course knew quite well whether these two messengers would be challenged or would not; but treats the point as a possible contingency to be prepared for. From the two next Gospels we learn that these disciples were so challenged.

“The Lord hath need of them.” Such was the plea that in case of opposition to the act being offered, was to be used; and which Jesus assures these disciples would be effectual. All difficulties, as we know, vanish before the omnipotence to which there are no impossibilities even. It is manifest that this plea must have owed its efficacy to some powerful reinforcement of its own inherent convincingness.

Still “the Lord hath need of them” is an allegation that the world over in all ages and with all creeds has been a most potent method of acquiring things of all kinds. Its efficacy is now, it must be owned, comparatively precarious; for in these days the “needs” of the Lord and the certainty that anything entrusted to

his many and varied subordinates here for the purpose of meeting those "needs" will reach its destination, both labour under grave doubts.

Much exception has been taken by unfriendly critics to this method of requisitioning these two asses. It is certainly not desirable to regard it as a precedent. Still we are not able to see any great offence in the borrowing of these animals for a short time. No doubt when finished with they were scrupulously returned.

We cannot get to like our author's peculiar formula on this subject, here again met with. "All this was done," we may rest assured, for some very much more important purpose than to fulfil what Zechariah had spoken. It is not, perhaps, for mortals to seek to find out the reason why Jesus first determined to enter Jerusalem in this manner, and why he subsequently caused Zechariah to forecast the incident. But though we may not know the real reason of this memorable occurrence, it is no use offering the making good of what Zechariah had spoken as a genuine or adequate reason of anything.

In this particular instance, however, there is much ground for suspecting that this formula of our author's is correct in its strict and literal sense; and that what immediately follows regarding the two asses was narrated by our author "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," even to the extent of "fulfilling" a literary flourish of the prophet's very commonly found in Hebrew literature, and apparently regarded as an embellishment.

The verse here quoted by our author, and quoted in his usual free style, is from the prophet Zechariah. It would appear that prophecy ran in Zechariah's family, for he himself assures us that his grandfather Iddo was also a prophet. As we do not possess any of Iddo's utterances, we learn from this fact that many of the prophecies of Jewish prophets have, unfortunately, or, as we cannot but think, fortunately perished. For if his grandfather's style bore much resemblance to Zechariah's own, we cannot think anyone can sincerely regret our non-possession of the former's productions. We candidly state, Reader, that in the whole work of Zechariah we can only find one solitary—to us—intelligible prediction. It is the one where, speaking of this same

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

mount of Olives just named by our author, Zechariah asserts, "And the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof towards the east and towards the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south"; a predicted occurrence which, let us hope, may continue to remain unfulfilled.

"Thy king cometh unto thee." The many kings of Jerusalem were, on the whole, of such a kind that it is not pleasant to see Jesus added to the list. Our author began his Gospel by showing us the royal lineage of Jesus; or rather of Joseph, for our inability to discern the connexion of the two still continues. It was then at Jerusalem, as it has so often been elsewhere; the *de facto* royal family was not the *de jure* one. It is, however, much pleasanter to take Jesus' kingship of Jerusalem in the wider sense in which he is king of all other kingdoms, and king even of all the republics.

Having found and brought these two asses, the disciples, we are told, "put on them their clothes." Why both animals should be thus accoutred it is difficult to see. In the second and third Gospels we find one ass only, and we are told that he had never been mounted before Jesus rode him.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them.

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

Perhaps Peter or some other disciple rode the other.

"And they set him thereon." Each reader must picture what is here meant as he best can. Whatever may be the true interpretation of this singular "thereon," the phrase "they set him" is a very curious item. Jesus was in the prime of life, and surely needed no help to mount an ass.

Why the painters represent Jesus as sat sideways upon, rather than astride this animal, we do not know. Even supposing Jesus to have been clad in something after the manner usually represented in pictures, we fail to see how his posture is at all improved by his being placed on the animal at right angles. The notion that such was the current method of riding the animal in question is a very doubtful one.

The bungling and highly absurd narrative our author places before us in this passage has afforded great merriment to scoffers, and has received some mild censure even in orthodox quarters. How much our author's zeal exceeded his discretion in this matter of applying prophecies to Jesus, his "Nazarene"

blunder early showed us. And anything more unskilful and infelicitous—apart from their grave inaccuracy—than many of his “selections” from the prophets, could hardly be imagined.

The way in which Matthew here makes his narrative “fulfil” a prophetic figure of speech even, is very humbling; and the willingness thus shown to bring his narrative into close agreement with an Old Testament passage is not very reassuring as to his accuracy in matters where that object was not concerned.

Why Jesus should make his entry into Jerusalem upon an ass is a mystery, though there must obviously have been some important reason for an act determined upon and predicted ages before its occurrence. Still it must be owned, not only in sacred but even in secular matters, that it is impossible to discern in the events predicted and the events not predicted by the Jewish prophets, any rational scale of real relative importance.

Perhaps it may be said that the word meek in this passage from Zechariah may be regarded as a partial reason for this peculiar mode of entering Jerusalem selected by Jesus. As far as it goes this view is quite intelligible. A person mounted upon an ass is at all times a spectacle of meekness, patience, and apparent absence of ambition; and a person of importance making his entry into a famous city in this manner—even allowing for the rather better status of the ass in Eastern countries—certainly thus proclaims himself a despiser of pageantry and pomp of all kinds.

How far such an entry into a city may be regarded as respectful or complimentary to the citizens thereof, or how far such an entry into his capital by a king would be likely to be regarded by his subjects in an agreeable light, need not be discussed. But we cannot help thinking it would have been pleasanter in every way to have read that Jesus entered Jerusalem on foot, as he apparently entered every other city he visited; or better still that the squadron of angels which had hovered around him when a babe in these same suburbs of Jerusalem many years ago, and delighted the eyes of some shepherds, had re-appeared and escorted him to the temple. But vain are our regrets and repinings at the things omnipotence both suffers and leaves undone.

In its wider sense the thought of the Creator of the Universe entering Jerusalem upon an ass raises a curious train of reflections. The amazement which a general contemplation of the religions and religious beliefs of mankind gives rise to has often been expressed;

and the genuine astonishment which religionists who accept one series of marvels feel at the infatuation of those who accept a different series may be met with on all sides, and is both sad and ludicrous.

Christian derision of other faiths is so familiar to us that we forget how absurd and offensive Christian dogmas may be to believers of other creeds. There is no doubt, for example, that to Jews and to Mahometans the ideas of a Trinity, an incarnate Deity, and a crucified Creator are positively painful. Christian missionaries tell us that even to savages, whose religious beliefs are sufficiently appalling and amazing, the idea of a crucified Creator is a severe trial.

In the first and second centuries, when the adherents of the ancient heathen faith and the adherents of the new and juvenile Christianity were exchanging a wordy warfare, ridiculing each others' miracles and asserting their own, jeering at their rivals' credulity and apologizing for their own, the spectacle was in many respects very amusing. Whether the partizans of Jehovah or of Jupiter had the heavier task it would not be easy to say; but the attack upon Homeric fables by men who had to defend Balaam's ass and Aaron's rod, and *vice versâ*, were extremely diverting. This famous ride of the Creator of the Milky Way upon an ass into Jerusalem seems to show with what wise and far-seeing purposes the faith-capacity of our race has been made so elastic as it is—deplorable as that same fact in its general results may appear to be.

“And a very great multitude.” The real dimensions of this

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed *them* in the way.

and other Gospel multitudes are a matter of pure conjecture. Whether in this case the phrase really meant a small concourse or a vast throng, or something intermediate, every reader must form his own estimate. Of whom this

multitude was composed it is equally impossible to say. Many think it consisted mainly of Galileans coming up for the approaching Passover. In the fourth Gospel—whose narrative of events at this period bears no resemblance to the one given here—this multitude comes to meet Jesus from and out of Jerusalem itself. For according to that Gospel this was by no means Jesus' first visit to the Jewish capital; this was not the first occasion on which the daughter of Sion had seen her king.

And who did this multitude consider Jesus to be; in what light did they regard him? This is a still more puzzling question.

They call him son of David, and Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee; two titles that throw little light upon the view of Jesus they really entertained. And what had become of this "very great multitude" so friendly to Jesus when a few days later another "multitude" unhappily succeeded in clamouring for his blood? Many of the "natural" elements of these Gospel records are to our thinking more astonishing than the supernatural ones.

The spreading of garments and branches of trees by way of carpet was an ancient Oriental form of homage, and may be read of as having been paid even to very small personages. It is a childish, but still a sincere, method of showing deference.

The cries and salutations of these multitudes do not throw much light upon what they thought of Jesus. What

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

did they mean by terming Jesus "the son of David"? We can hardly think these multitudes were aware of the genealogy that opens this Gospel and shows us how Jesus was "descended" from the Psalmist. Nor does the word

Hosanna help us; it was a term freely used by the Jews at the impending festival, and may have been applied to Jesus in several different senses. Probably most of these people hoped that Jesus might be about to "redeem Israel," or attempt the task, as other notabilities had already done before and as others afterwards did.

A person entering Jerusalem in this manner would naturally cause some commotion in the place; the people

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

of the city therefore inquire "Who is this?"

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

"And the multitude said" a very cautious reply "This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee"; an answer that could give offence to no one. In this it differed widely from the

title with which this multitude had saluted Jesus outside the city, "son of David"; a title which, if used after the entry into Jerusalem, would undoubtedly have aroused the attention of the Roman authorities.

Our author's very unsatisfactory style is here markedly illus-

12 ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the

trated; for who could gather from what is here given whether an interval elapsed between this verse and the last, or whether Jesus proceeded direct to the temple and per-

moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.

formed the act here recorded? We find from the next Gospel that on the day of his entry Jesus went to the temple, "looked round about upon all things," and at even returned to Bethany with the twelve. Presumably Jesus left Jerusalem on foot, for his leaving the city in the way he entered it would have a very tame appearance. And it seems from the second Gospel that it was on the following day that Jesus, coming from Bethany into Jerusalem again, effected the clearing of the temple here described.

The absence in these Gospels of clear indications of the time and connection of occurrences is one of the most trying features anyone studying them has to contend with. The order in which events transpire, the connection or non-connection of occurrences, may be a matter of great moment. The time, place, and circumstances of an incident may materially affect its bearing and its import. The way in which these important points are neglected in these Gospels, and still more the curious way in which in the four Gospels events are displaced and transposed, are very harassing to readers, and render a clear conception of this Gospel history quite impossible.

In the fourth Gospel, which makes Jesus visit Jerusalem at the beginning of his public career, we have a description of either this or a similar exploit which Jesus performed, but which in that Gospel is ascribed to that earlier visit to the capital.

The irreconcilable manner in which what seems the same incident is often given in the different Gospels—"for parallel passages," as they are called of these Gospels, have often but a very faint resemblance to the Euclidean meaning of the word parallel—early led to what is called the theory of duplicate occurrence; the hypothesis that there were, for example, two cleansings of the temple, two cases of women pouring ointment, &c. It is a theory which removes in some cases difficulties not otherwise surmountable; but it is a theory not much liked, and one that feels to most people a particularly dull and insipid one.

In the account of the "first" cleansing of the temple, described in the fourth Gospel, we are told that Jesus "made a scourge of small cords," with which he drove the traders and their sheep and oxen out of the temple, and poured out the changers' money and overthrew the tables.

We can make no attempt to picture the scene thus described, or

the one placed before us in the present verse that is not distinctly unpleasant. Neither Jesus nor anyone else could possibly look to advantage thus engaged. Anyone driving people out of a building with cords, and overthrowing tables and seats could not possibly look dignified.

It seems a great pity Jesus did not make use of some supernatural power in a case of this kind, for the use of such ordinary mundane methods as those here resorted to was very humbling—would have humbled even an ordinary mortal. But the use and non-use of miracle power by its possessors are an enigma, as we have already remarked. The only approach to a discernible principle in the exercise and non-exercise of miracle power by all its many reputed possessors is that the willingness to exercise the power seems to have decreased as the worthiness and appropriateness of the occasion increased. Almost immediately after this prosaic clearing of the temple, miracle power was used by Jesus to destroy a fig tree.

The "It is written," quoted by Jesus in this verse, is made up of a line from Isaiah and another from Jeremiah, from which the bewildering, nay appalling, inference seems to be deducible that two prophets may have to be taken in conjunction in order to arrive at a proper meaning.

13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Temples, Mosques, Pagodas, and other like edifices are, with the exception of Pyramids, the dreariest wastes of human exertion in existence. Still the artistic merits of these structures often render them worthy of better uses than those to which the temple of Jehovah was, it appears, turned in the time of Jesus. It ought, however, to be borne in mind that the doves, sheep, and oxen here alluded to were absolutely required in pursuance of that animal slaughter with which Jehovah was Mosaically worshipped; and that even money-changers were a necessity to the Jews coming at this particular time from all parts to keep the Passover, for Gentile coins were not admitted into the divine treasury. We certainly fail to see in any of the acts here named any justification for the term "den of thieves." It would have been well if houses of prayer had never been used for worse doings and for the inciting and fomenting of worse thoughts and worse passions than those arising from commercial dealings. The bigotries, cruelties, hatreds, and persecutions that have been instigated and fanned in the

religious temples of the world simply dwarf the sins of market-places.

The temple, for whose purity Jesus here showed himself so solicitous and zealous, he permitted some forty years afterwards to be polluted and destroyed by the Romans. And some centuries later he permitted the sacred ground once covered by the temple, with its holy of holies, to be covered with a Mahometan sanctuary.

Miracles recorded in a general manner are not very impressive or interesting; still, miracles of healing are at all times agreeable reading. Even in a medieval chronicle, where they are undoubtedly somewhat monotonous, we never weary of them as we do of the fantastic miracles. At this particular time there would be abundance of cases of the blind and the lame for Jesus to heal. For at the time of the Passover it was the custom of these afflicted ones, and of many who simulated such afflictions, to gather at the temple and solicit the alms of the pious.

We greatly wonder where all these whilom blind and lame ones whom Jesus had restored were during the following days. When Jesus was arrested, tried, and treated in the way hereinafter described, we look in vain for a single one of these once blind and once lame ones. Not one of their voices appears to have been raised in protest or in attestation. How they could hold their peace is incomprehensible. Our indignation as we think of this almost makes us regret that Jesus healed such unworthy beings. It was, however, precisely the same with the countless multitudes Jesus had healed up in Galilee. None of the subjects of Jesus' innumerable miracles appear as having come forward in the early days of Christianity to aid or to testify to the new faith.

When the chief priests and the Scribes came to the temple and saw the wonderful works of Jesus, how he healed the blind and the lame, we read "they were sore displeased." The credibility of such a statement must be left to each reader. To us it is addressed in vain.

It is usually supposed that in all its essential features human nature remains the same from age to age. Whoever can receive this assertion of our author's must first believe that human nature has undergone a fundamental change since the time

here spoken of; for that any human beings would now be sore displeased to see blind eyes opened who could believe?

And yet we are here told that men, sensible and civilized, and the most educated and cultured of their time, and also the chief representatives of the true religion of Jehovah, could behold a person cure the lame and blind and be sore displeased at the sight. If such a record be believable at all it simply demonstrates what religious prepossessions can accomplish. It shows us that religious beliefs can not only warp and distort, but can actually invert the normal processes of the human mind and the human heart. The worst enemies, the most thorough-going opponents, of all religious beliefs, could not wish for a better case than what is here recorded as having taken place between Jesus and his Father's chief priests in this Jerusalem temple.

"And the children crying in the temple." Unless their supernatural animation be assumed, it must be admitted these little Jews were a great deal more knowing and perceiving than their fathers and adult Jews generally. The generation to which Jesus came was, as we know, a perverse one; but the generation which followed it was no better. When these little ones were grown up they resembled their fathers; indeed, so far as Christianity is concerned, every generation of Jews has been a perverse one.

If we are right in taking boys to have been boys in those days—for the proposition that men were men seems very doubtful—their hosannahing of Jesus as he made his singular entry into Jerusalem for the approaching festival, needs no supernatural accounting for. On hearing these boys saluting Jesus as "the son of David" that these chief priests and Scribes should be "sore displeased" is quite intelligible. Indeed it was their bounden duty to be so, unless satisfied themselves that the salutation was a well-founded one.

These chief priests and Scribes therefore ask Jesus if he hears what these boys are saying. And in one respect

16 And said unto him, Hearst thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.

at any rate they got a reply that to a reader of these Gospels is as refreshing as it is rare—the simple but pleasant little word "Yea."

Falling, however, into his constant custom, Jesus proceeds by way of reply to ask another question. "Have ye never read?" he asks his Father's chief priests, the portion of a Psalm he proceeds to quote for them. Whether the question was meant to be satirical and irritating, we

cannot say; but the chief priests of Jehovah could scarcely help feeling it to be so.

“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise.” We have become so accustomed to the diversion of Old Testament passages from the obvious meanings shown in their contexts, that anything in this line no longer surprises us. Anyone who will now read the Psalm from which this phrase is extracted may well wonder how even such great theologians as the chief priests of Jehovah, were ever to discover the occult meaning here fastened upon it by Jesus. How they were to perceive any point in the matter even after Jesus suggested it to them, we do not know.

“And he left them.” Though these words are attached to the next verse, they really belong to this. This incident closes very abruptly and not satisfactorily from any point of view. Did Jesus not give these men an opportunity of answering his own question? If he did, who can help wondering what it was, and why it was not recorded? If our author knew it, its suppression does him little credit. Our author’s candour has received much Christian praise; and in one or two matters very justly. But a more thoroughly, and in many points unfairly, *ex parte* narrator we cannot possibly imagine.

It is true disputations between the Second Person of the Trinity and the chief priests of the First are not agreeable subjects to dwell upon, but their extreme gravity entitled them to be fully and fairly recorded. How little grace the occupancy of the highest religious posts necessarily involves, these chief priests and Scribes instructively set forth to us. A little further on we shall find that Jesus declares Moses’ seat to be filled by serpents, vipers, and children of hell even. Whether Jesus’ own popes and cardinals, and other chief priests have upon the whole been any better than these successors of Moses is a point we need not enter into, but upon which we are not without an opinion.

Jerusalem at this particular time would be very crowded; besides, to sustain in Jerusalem the character of king thereof and son of David, in which, according to this Gospel, Jesus had entered it, would be a difficult and delicate task. We cannot therefore wonder that Jesus went back to Bethany and “lodged there.” Matthew does not tell us where he and his eleven co-disciples

17 ¶ And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

lodged. It would seem from one of the following verses that they accompanied Jesus to and from Bethany; and most likely they lodged there also.

It is singular, seeing that he was so near the place, that we do not read of Jesus visiting his birthplace, Bethlehem. Still the associations and remembrances of that town and its coasts would certainly not be pleasant ones. The parents of many of the little massacred Bethlehemites would be still living, and to them a second visit from Jesus could not be very agreeable, presuming them to be aware that he had been the cause of the terrible tragedy that had desolated their homes thirty years ago; and presuming they knew of the extremely unheroic flight by which he had himself escaped the fate of their own little ones. With Jesus himself, too, the somewhat ghastly absence in Bethlehem of men of his own age and other reminders would certainly stir up painful memories.

We now come to the last of Jesus' miracles. And a very small one it is. It is not only the smallest of Jesus' own miracles, but also, we are inclined to think, the very smallest to be found in any of the many voluminous records of the miraculous. The moral or lesson to be derived from this little miracle is quite in keeping; it is very small both in size and in worth.

It appears that on leaving Bethany with his disciples in the morning, Jesus "as he returned into the city" hungered. The immediate reason of this hunger and its purpose we do not know; but we know they must have been perfectly voluntary. The consummate ease with which Jesus could extemporize bread and meat and also wine shows us that privations of such a kind as the absence of these articles implies can never have been with Jesus involuntary and enforced.

In the account of this incident given in the next Gospel we read that this fig tree was "afar off," and that Jesus, noticing leaves upon it, went to it to see "if haply he might find anything thereon." In this he was disappointed, finding nothing but leaves. How he could reasonably have expected anything else is not intelligible, for we are expressly told "for the time of figs was not yet." No doubt it was annoying to be thus taken out of his way for nothing. The use and non-use by Jesus of his omniscience,

18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

like the use and non-use of his miracle power, constantly offer us a problem whose solution is best left unattempted.

Addressing this fig tree Jesus said, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." This command the fig tree at once obeyed and withered away.

Trees and vegetables have never been thought to be open to praise or to blame. Being the unconscious and inevitable products of their soil and other surroundings which their want of locomotion forbids their changing, the members of the vegetable world seem clearly exempt from moral responsibility. It appears, however, that in the view of Jesus, this fig tree had failed in its duty; and as a warning to all other fruit trees that they ought to have fruit even out of season, Jesus punished this celebrated plant with capital punishment. We think gardeners act wisely in leaving this divine example humanly unimitated; just as Christians generally act wisely in leaving so many other of Jesus' examples and injunctions in abeyance also.

The only moral or lesson we can derive from this cursing of the fig tree is that Jesus was not always in a good humour; and that when not in a good humour he was, like humbler folks, unreasonable. How faithfully and closely, though microscopically, we are made in the divine image, all the holy Scriptures of mankind truly show us. The impious but celebrated rival theory that all the gods are made most faithfully though on a magnified scale in man's own image need not here be discussed.

One thing is clear in the Prophet of Nazareth whatever else may be obscure. Jesus was a person of many moods, easily and quickly changing from one to the another. He gave Peter the keys of heaven and termed him Satan in the same breath. And as we repeatedly see in these Gospels, he passes from the creamiest of impracticable philanthropy to the cruelest and fiercest of threats. Whatever other merits Jesus may have possessed, even a trace of a judicial spirit will be sought in vain; he lavishes the most excessive and unqualified praises and censures upon things only very partially deserving of either.

It is interesting to compare the "parallel" passage of the next Gospel with this verse. How marvels tend to vary and to grow is a familiar piece of knowledge.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

As we have already remarked, we have here

reached the last of Jesus' miracles. It is indeed curious, and most significant, to reflect that in all the remaining chapters of this narrative, which include and involve the most critical, most public, and far the most important portion of the Gospel record, not a single miraculous act on the part of Jesus is to be found. In the third Gospel a further small miracle of Jesus—the healing of Malchus' ear which had been cut off by Peter—is recorded.

In answer to the marvelling of the disciples, Jesus proceeds to lay down a wide proposition indeed. We must, however, first say that we are at a loss to perceive why these disciples should marvel at what they had just seen. To men who were themselves accustomed to healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead we are unable to understand how the blighting of a tree should cause any astonishment whatever.

In answer to the disciples' exclamation of surprise at the promptitude with which the fig tree had pined away, Jesus assures them that if only they "have faith and doubt not," they should themselves be able not only to blight trees, but also to remove mountains, and accomplish everything else. This is a curious and naive assurance to a number of practical and experienced miracle-workers.

We have already met with similar assurances on the part of Jesus. How faith equal to a grain of mustard seed would command mountains to move away; how, indeed, to that small grain of faith, even, "nothing shall be impossible"; in short, how faith equals omnipotence, we have already seen.

It is very remarkable how extremely mercurial and fluctuating a thing a religious faith seems to be. Pious souls of all types of belief have left on record how extremely oscillating their states of faith have been, ranging from gloomy misgivings up to ecstatic assurance; the two extremes usually following each other in quick succession, as might have been anticipated.

That this was the case with these disciples is very evident. A few days after this very talk with their Master about this fig tree they all abandoned him and fled; their faith having clearly taken temporary flight, at any rate. Their miracle-power also fluctuated; concomitantly with their faith, it is to be supposed. We may remember how the whole twelve failed through unbelief, on one

occasion, to eject a dumb devil even. On the other hand, in the case of Peter, his faith, and consequently his miracle-power, arose we are sorry to say, to the enabling point of blighting, not fig trees, but human beings. A very curious phrase occurs in the next Gospel, which tells us that even as regards Jesus himself "he could there do no mighty work"; and the explanation there added, that that disquieting fact arose not from want of faith on the part of Jesus himself, but from the want of it in those around him, seems a very partial and unsatisfactory one only.

It is obvious that in promising fulfilment of all believing requests Jesus committed himself to impossibilities. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. For, undeterred by his declaration that to himself all things are possible, we do not hesitate to say that neither Jesus, Jehovah, nor anyone else, can grant the prayers of believers if, as is constantly the case, those prayers involve absolute contradictions.

The spectacle the world has so often beheld of two armies arrayed for battle, each praying the Lord of hosts for victory, well illustrates the point; for to give to both a decisive victory is beyond the capacity of heaven itself—though not more so than any other inherent contradiction. How often even in his own household of faith have prayers gone up to Jesus from its two great sections for the overthrow of the Papacy, and the reclamation thereto of Protestants respectively; either of which might be, both of which cannot be, and neither of which is granted!

Experience shows us that from some cause or other the promises set forth in these two verses are now entirely inoperative. Either the promises fail, or the condition precedent—belief without doubt—is nowhere to be found. For where is the Christian who can shift a barrowfull of sand, let alone a mountain, except by ordinary means? Or where shall we find a single one of those signs which follow them that believe, a list of which brings the next Gospel to an end?

Let no rash sceptic, however, scout the potency of prayer in its subjective aspect. The world has had many a sharp experience of what the month of prayer has wrought in Islam; and how often prayer has whetted the Christian sword we know but too well. The outbursts of fanaticism in Christendom and elsewhere, with their frightful results, have invariably been preceded and fomented by distinctly traceable intensifications of prayer and devotion.

Another encounter between Jesus and the chief priests is now recorded. Jesus appears to have gone up from Bethany to Jerusalem daily; obviously spending most of the time there in the temple. What was the nature of Jesus' teaching in the temple—whether it was like his teaching and preaching in Galilee, where his Christship was kept secret, or it was now in these few final days complete Christianity—it is quite impossible to ascertain.

In asking Jesus for his authority and "Who gave thee this authority?" these chief priests and elders were perfectly justified. It was on their part a proper, natural, and straightforward inquiry; one which had they not put to Jesus they would have neglected their plain duty. It was an inquiry which the priests and officials of any other temple, cathedral, or mosque, would, and justly so, not fail to now put to any volunteer teacher making his appearance therein. For Jesus had no known or recognized status; indeed it is very doubtful if these chief priests and elders had ever heard his name before this appearance of his in their temple. What a pity those bashful angels who escorted Jesus on mountain tops and other quiet places did not accompany him in these visits to the temple! How gloriously they would have explained and confirmed everything!

Whatever else these chief priests and elders may have been, they were certainly the lawful custodians and lawful authorities of this temple; and to ask an innovator for his authority and warrant was their bounden duty. To notice how many of the older Christian theologians, who were often the most servile defenders of the lawful authorities of their own day, animadvert upon these lawful authorities of Jesus' time is very instructive.

Reader, we cannot express how intensely we have grown to dislike this habitual custom of Jesus to reply to an inquiry,—even the simplest and plainest—with a counter-question of his own. Once and again such a course may be appropriate; but as a general practice anything more thoroughly unsatisfactory in all its bearings it is impossible to conceive. Silence is better than converse if we cannot give and get plain replies to plain questions.

Even if there were much more in this retort of Jesus to his

23 ¶ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

Father's priests than there really is, where is the dignity, where the candour, where the straightforwardness of such a rejoinder to a question so serious and so solemn?

The chief priests and elders had asked Jesus a question it was in his power not only to answer, but to answer with irresistible demonstration if he wished. Jesus asked them a disputable question, to which neither they nor any other men could give more than a very conjectural answer.

"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" is a problem that raised either of John or of any other prophet that ever made his appearance on our planet, receives and has ever received a babel of answers. Who can ever forget the memorable "Art thou he?" which John asked concerning Jesus himself? The asking of that question is the very last thing recorded of this same John.

Before they gave any answer to Jesus' question, these chief priests and elders reasoned amongst themselves, and our author purports to give us their reasoning; a profession which may be taken for what it is worth.

26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

These chief priests and elders did not believe in John; for half-a-dozen verses further on Jesus expressly tells us so. They could not, therefore, profess that his baptism was from heaven. On the other hand, the memory of John, who had now probably been dead a couple of years, was held in honour by the people. Hence, if they declared John's baptism to have been of men, "we fear the people," these chief priests and elders said to each other; so at least our author alleges. He also declares that they said to each other, "all hold John as a prophet." The inaccuracy of this absurd statement is shown by what Jesus himself said some time back when speaking of the perverse generation which would respond neither to John's methods nor to his own, he declared that "they say" of John "He hath a devil." The prophet whom all men hold as a prophet has yet to be born. And if "all men" held John a prophet, how came they to pay such little regard to his declaration that he was himself a mere satellite to the Prophet of Nazareth?

As a result of their deliberations these chief priests reply to Jesus, "We cannot tell"; an answer that really did them no discredit whatever. At the same

27 And they answered Jesus and said, We cannot tell. And he said

unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

time this declaration of the chief priests of the living God that they were unable to say whether a given prophet was from heaven or of men, is surely one of the most significant and one of the most excruciatingly diverting things anywhere to be found.

This answer was at any rate a very candid one; shows, indeed, a great deal more candour than astuteness. For these priests were under no obligation to give an answer to Jesus' question at all; they might easily, and very properly, have declared such a question irrelevant, or, if so disposed, have themselves propounded any quantity of counter-dilemmas.

The result of this cross-questioning was that the origin of Jesus' authority and the source of John's baptism were left where they were.

But though Jesus did not give any answer to the very proper ques-

28 ¶ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.

29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not.

tion put to him by these chief priests and elders, he proceeded to give them some parables. That they did not consider these a satisfactory substitute is very clear, and in that view we most heartily concur.

And first Jesus asks these great ecclesiastics a very tiny riddle which Christian commentators dignify with the title of parable of the two sons. A man had two sons whom he commanded to go and work in his vineyard. The first said he would not, but afterwards went. The second said he would go, but did not. Which of the two did his father's will?

A few chapters back we were considering a very singular proposition laid down by Jesus, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Here the sentiment Deeds not Words, is laid down; it can scarcely be said, enforced.

These chief priests and elders very good humouredly consented to solve the small riddle propounded to them.

31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Whereupon, Reader, we are truly grieved to find that Jesus addressed them in terms the most personal, most bitter, and most offensive that can be imagined.

So far as we can discern these chief priests and elders had hitherto treated Jesus with courtesy. They did not

believe in him, it is true, but that was no uncommon sin. How very few of those who had the honour of seeing Jesus believed in him is very evident; non-believers including as we know those brethren and sisters of his own, and those citizens of Nazareth who had known him so long and so well. The terrible destiny awaiting for their unbelief those cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, which had enjoyed Jesus' presence so much, which had seen most of his mighty works, and which had, indeed, practically monopolized his public life, shows how little unusual there was in the non-belief of these priests and elders in Jesus.

It is quite impossible to discern in anything these chief priests had hitherto said or done any ground or any justification for the very bitter terms in which Jesus now addressed them. "Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." What would the priests of any other temple or church thus addressed in their own edifice say and do now? Neither these chief priests nor Jesus himself were, or professed to be, friends of religious liberty or toleration; but even if they had been, to go and deride the adherents and authorities of another creed in their own building is not, and never was, any part of true religious liberty. For it ought to be remembered that these chief priests were not the aggressors. Jesus had come to them; it was not they who had gone to him.

Nor are attacks upon religious bodies made in such a strain as this at all to be admired, even at times and in places where such attacks are perfectly justifiable. A comparison between religious leaders and harlots to the disadvantage of the former, though it is quite possible for the estimate to be in many cases a very true one, is a method of attack that never did, and never deserved to, lead to any good result. And what, Reader, are we to think, if this estimate of Jesus be a just one, of the Jehovah who thus knowingly allowed men who were human dregs to become his own chief priests and representatives on earth?

As we think of these worthies addressed by Jesus in the way here given in their own temple we wonder they did not begin rending their clothes. We read that at the conclusion of this interview, they "sought to lay hands on" Jesus; and we should very much like to have known what they said to him, which our author, however, does not give us. A few days later these chief priests, however, took their revenge in the manner then, and alas! long

afterwards, used for bringing religious controversy to an end. They put Jesus to death, with, however, his own full consent; a course, indeed, that not only fell in with the Christian "scheme," but which, as we know, was absolutely necessary thereto. How many religious disputes Christian tribunals, notably the Inquisition, afterwards settled, or tried to settle, in a like way, is known only too well.

"The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" is a statement whose real meaning it is not possible to feel very certain about. It may mean that all the three parties named enter that kingdom at last; or may mean that none of the three do so. All we can feel sure of is that publicans and harlots were more likely to be successful than chief priests and elders.

Our author, who was once a publican, undoubtedly entered the kingdom; and with regard to harlots, a lady usually supposed to have been a member of that mournful profession—though so far as we can see on very doubtful grounds—and whose name of Magdalen has been bestowed on so many modern institutions connected with the melancholy subject, became a notable figure in early Christian history; having the very conspicuous honour of being the very first person to whom Jesus re-appeared after his death. On the other hand, no Jewish priest of that time, so far as is known, ever became a member of the kingdom of heaven.

"John came to you in the way of righteousness." What a guarded statement this seems. One would have thought these chief priests and elders were about to be reminded, and upbraided for not remembering, how John had declared himself to be a mere harbinger to the one who was now speaking to them. There can, however, be no doubt that these priests and elders were as completely ignorant of John's declaration upon that subject as they were of the memorable interview between Jesus and a certain great Potentate which immediately followed John's announcement.

The great Jewish historian who wrote his work about the same time Matthew wrote this gives us a slight sketch of the Baptist, which does not very well agree, especially as to the cause of John's death, with what we find in these Gospels. In that work we are told that John was widely esteemed as a righteous man and religious reformer, a view that there was nothing to prevent men then and now quite concurring with but we find no mention what-

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

ever of John's having declared himself a subordinate of any other teacher.

"Ye believed him not." The way in which existing ecclesiastical authorities are troubled and bewildered by the appearance of a new religious teacher and reformer has received abundant illustrations in Christian annals. The early church was fearfully harassed by ambiguous teachers. And when in later times those reformers appeared who were destined to sever the household of faith in twain, by one-half of which they are now revered and by the other half detested—the reception they met with at the hands of the Christian "authorities" of the time was a very painful one in more senses than one. The reception met with by those later and minor reformers, who established the numerous lesser varieties of Christianity now in vogue, was also a very frigid one; as hostile indeed as the milder spirit of the times permitted. Even in our own day we have witnessed the appearance of a new organization, which gives itself a military name and garb for the purpose of more effectually serving the prince of peace. And the way in which that new organization, in spite of the many recruits it brings to Jesus, is looked askance upon by staid Christians and Christian authorities may serve to remind us how these chief priests must have regarded John.

"But the publicans and the harlots believed him." In what sense—literal or figurative—this ought to be taken it is difficult to say. John had certainly baptized Jerusalem and all Judea some three years ago, but to how little purpose the remainder of this Gospel shows us. That John impressed and reformed many members of the two classes here named may well be hoped and believed, for John might have said as Jesus did, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And surely the chief priests and elders of Israel might well be supposed to be amongst the ninety and nine just persons who "need no repentance"; amongst the ninety and nine sheep that went not astray; amongst the whole who needed not a physician. How it was all those who had believed John and been baptized by him did not accept Jesus—whose humble precursor John had, according to these Gospels, declared himself to be—is a problem any approach to a solution of which we have never met with. Perhaps, Reader, it may not be out of place to remember that the least member of the kingdom of heaven was greater than John.

The last clause of this verse is not intelligible to us; we cannot make out what these men "had seen," nor what is meant by belief following repentance.

Jesus now invited or commanded these chief priests and elders to "hear another parable." Bearing in mind

33 ¶ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

the terms in which Jesus had just addressed these men, their consenting to hear another parable displayed no little forbearance.

Whatever we may think of the moral of this and of many of the other parables of Jesus, the elements and details of many of these parables can make little claim to likelihood or naturalness; often indeed set all rational probability at total defiance. Some of Jesus' parables—especially those peculiar to the third Gospel—are felicitous and true to life and Nature. On the other hand, some are in many of their features so entirely improbable and non-natural, that they are practically unsupposable even. Of this latter kind is the parable now before us.

A householder planted a vineyard, hedged it round, dug a winepress, and built a tower. He then let this vineyard to husbandmen and went away into a far country.

So far so good. When vintage time came round the householder sent his servants to these husbandmen to receive the fruits of his vineyard. Here a very important element of uncertainty creeps into the parable. It is to be supposed that some bargain or agreement was made with these husbandmen.

If the owner wanted all the fruits or more than his just share, these husbandmen acted quite right in demurring to the claim. If, on the other hand, this householder only demanded what was justly due to him, then it is clear these husbandmen had determined to turn rogues.

However this may have been, these husbandmen proceeded to violence. They ill-used and even killed one,

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

if not all of these servants of the householder. They "beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." Whether any purpose, beyond giving

a little picturesqueness to the parable, lurks in these details, we cannot say.

Undaunted by the fate which had befallen these servants,

36 Again, he sent other servants, more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

the householder, we read, sent some other servants on the same errand. "More than the first." If by this phrase more in number be meant, there was an evident miscalculation on the householder's part if mere strength were aimed at. For the number of these second messengers was insufficient to overpower the mutineers, and these second collectors of the fruits met with the exact fate of their predecessors.

Some expositors think that by "more than the first" is meant servants of more importance and higher degree than the preceding ones, and who would be thought by the householder to be more likely to influence and impress these husbandmen. Whichever explanation be adopted, it is clear that the inferences and expectations of the householder were fallacious.

Even so far as we have now reached, this householder does not strike one as a very sensible or judicious person. But he now takes a step which—we are speaking of the parable in its literal and natural aspect—ignores all prudence and good sense, and which is, humanly speaking, a piece of mere infatuation or something worse still.

This householder now decides to send his own son to visit these miscreants; with the natural and foreseeable result that his son shared the fate of all his other messengers. The reasoning ascribed to the householder for venturing on so perilous a step is of a very extraordinary kind. "They will reverence my son," he argued. There was not much ground for thinking that reverence was very strong in these husbandmen, seeing that they had flouted, defied, and even killed the various and known representatives of the householder; and it is not easy to see how the householder could reasonably persuade himself that his son would fare better at the hands of such men. The event showed how disastrously mistaken this householder was on the point.

To suppose that any human parent would reason in such a manner and send his son unaccompanied amongst a band of brigands who had already killed a number of his servants—if it be possible to entertain such a supposition at all—is simply to suppose that any such human parent must have taken leave of his senses altogether.

On this cheerful errand the son is sent. And on seeing this son,

38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

these husbandmen are credited with a mode of reasoning which leaves even the householder's ratiocination far behind. "This is the heir," they said; "let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance."

The only thing that can give to such a picture even an air of probability is to suppose the event to have occurred in a barbarous country where no law or civilized government was in existence; a supposition which is however excluded by the other circumstances of the parable. Thieves and assassins are indeed to be found in civilized countries; but for a number of these to coolly remain on the spot in possession of the scene and proofs of their crime, and await ejection and punishment is a wild extravagance indeed.

Having laid this very singular parable before them, Jesus asks his hearers what the householder will do to these husbandmen on his return.

40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what shall he do unto those husbandmen?

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

To this question these hearers make the obvious reply that the householder will punish and destroy these criminal husbandmen, and will re-possess his vineyard, and let it out in future to better men. It may be assumed that Jesus approved this answer, though he did not expressly say so, but proceeded to quote and

expound a Scripture passage. In the other Gospels this answer of these hearers is attributed to Jesus himself.

Looking at this parable, Reader, in its purely natural aspect, it is impossible to discern in the conduct of this householder any approach even to wisdom or good sense. That when his first servants were ill-treated and killed he did not at once take measures against the criminals was a manifest failure of duty, and the clear cause of all the subsequent calamities. The second expedition of servants was a miscalculation in whatever light it may be regarded. And the despatch of his son was a proceeding whose rashness is painful to think of; and the result of which showed the folly of the line of reasoning which led to it. In short, any human being really acting as this householder acted would justly merit and receive censure, and even indignation.

With regard to the husbandmen, assuming that the original demands of the householder were just, and that these husbandmen

were consequently conscious evil-doers—their conduct is quite inexplicable; and their killing the householder's son in order to seize his inheritance is an idea too inane to dwell upon. The parable altogether has a very forced, artificial appearance; it seems an attempt to draw an analogy between things celestial and terrestrial not very open to any; an effort to establish a simile between things wanting in the real elements of a simile, and consequently producing incongruity at every point.

For according to theologians generally, the spiritual interpretation of this parable is something as follows. The householder represents Jehovah; the vineyard represents the Jewish people, though some expounders confine it to Jerusalem, and others extend it actually or prospectively to the human race; the rascally husbandmen are the Jewish leaders or people, or according to some expounders the people of Jerusalem, and according to others, mankind *en bloc*; the various servants are the prophets who were at various times sent to the Jews, for, as we know, none were ever sent to any other people; and the householder's son represents Jesus himself. Many theologians also find a quantity of inner and deeper meanings in the winepress, the tower, the far country, and the planting, hedging-round, digging, and building mentioned at the outset of the parable.

How far such an exegesis of this unpleasant parable is authentic, it is not for us to say. If it be so, let us hope such a portrayal of the various parties symbolized in this parable may be regarded as a merely transient one; for it is one that does little credit to anyone concerned in it.

Often doubtless had these chief priests and elders read the Psalm, a fragment of which Jesus here reminds them of. That they had ever supposed the passage contained the allusions and deep meanings now ascribed to it there is no ground for thinking; and indeed, what is there in this passage, or in the whole Psalm, to give anyone the faintest clue to the meanings we now know it to bear? Do you think, Reader, you would ever have suspected had you lived in those days that the "prophecies" quoted in these Gospels had the alleged Gospel meanings? Do you think the most profound of modern theologians had he lived at that time could have per-

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

ceived in the Book of Jonah those subtle signs and prognostications of Jesus now so clear to faith, if not to sight?

Applying his parable and his quotation from the Psalm to

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

these chief priests and elders, Jesus tells them that "the kingdom of God shall be taken from you." From this it appears that hitherto and at that time these officials were possessors and occupants of the kingdom of God. This

kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are, so far as can be made out from the references thereto in these Gospels, the same institution. If this be so, it is difficult to see in what way the kingdom of heaven announced by John and by Jesus as at hand was a new organization. We also learn from this passage that possession of and occupancy of the kingdom of God does not necessarily produce good effects upon men. Those chief priests, Pharisees, Scribes, and elders, who had hitherto been the only men in the world possessing the kingdom of God were, according to Jesus, very dreadful samples of our race.

"And given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This "nation" is a recognized Gospel enigma. Many commentators take the term in a wide, plural, and certainly somewhat arbitrary sense, and declare it means nations generally—in short the Gentiles. There are, on the other hand, many who take the passage in its strict meaning, and who believe that there is still in the world a nation which is successor to Israel as a special and peculiar favourite of heaven.

Which then is this "nation"? This is obviously a difficult and delicate question to attempt to answer; and one which accordingly receives very conflicting replies. And yet if Heaven has still a favourite nation in the world, there ought, one would think, to be some very clear and palpable evidences of a blessing so great and peculiar. The partizans of each national claimant to the distinction see of course unmistakeable signs of Heaven's special favour for their own candidate; but how much in this case it is as with beauty, piety, and many other matters, namely, things that are really in the looker's eye are thought to be in the object looked at is very evident.

Taking a rapid glance and confining our view to modern times, it certainly seemed three centuries ago as if faithful Spain, with her predominant splendour in the Old World, and her control of the

newly-found New World were Heaven's favourite. But she quickly fell away, though not from lack of faith; for she was ever what she is yet, a most Christian country.

Later on the Grand Nation, eldest child of the Church, which so late as the beginning of this century stood like a Colossus over Europe, might well have laid claim to heaven's special regard. She, however, has lost her pre-eminence; less indeed from her own declension than from the rapid growth of her rivals. There is no denying that in the case of France, loss of faith may have been the cause of her relatively lessened estate. She became eminently faithless, especially during the period of her greatest pre-eminence; and there are grave fears that she still continues so.

Holy Russia is in that part of the world largely regarded as the nation of nations. And her vast extent, great numbers, and almost sole possession of a special kind of Christian faith, are claims to, or vouchers of, celestial favour not easy to gainsay.

There are not wanting in these British Islands, more especially in the larger of the two, those who are satisfied that we islanders are now the true successors of Israel. Our extensive though scattered empire, our wealth, and our piety—though this latter is more variegated and uncertain than is altogether satisfactory—are the usual arguments in our favour.

The mighty young nation of the New World, which has already outstripped all other nations, and which at no remote date is destined to dwarf them, might now lay claims to Heaven's peculiar favour which it would be hopeless to match.

It may, of course, be said that in such considerations as these a worldly standard of measurement is applied. This is largely true; but we do not know how in trying to find "a nation" which may be regarded as having replaced Israel in divine favour, any other standard is available; for any spiritual gauge is evidently impracticable.

Our own decided opinion is that there is now no Heaven's favourite amongst the nations. The system was indeed a vicious one in principle, and its experiment with the Jews turned out a decided and deserved failure. Rigid impartiality, imperturbable neutrality is now the evident attitude of Heaven to human affairs. There are, indeed, plenty of pious wiseacres who can see and trace the hand of Providence in earthly concerns. But these seers see so differently that their professions are entirely unusable for any good

purpose, though not without some little—now happily very little—use for mischief. Certain it is, however, that the wonders and portents by which Heaven once constantly recognized its favoured Israel are no longer shown to any nation. Ended, too, is the sending of prophets; a fact for which we cannot, in our humble opinion, be too grateful.

This verse seems as though it ought to have preceded the last one, for it brings us back to the stone previously named by Jesus in the form of a quotation from a Psalm. This stone is declared by theologians to mean Jesus himself. The correctness of such a view is far from evident. Even as a metaphor, something so really insignificant in a building as a corner-stone, and of which in a building there are always a number, seems anything but a becoming or felicitous symbol of the Second Person of the Trinity.

Whatever either the Psalmist or Jesus may have meant by this stone, Jesus proceeds to make a statement concerning it which, though outwardly grimly literal, is supposed to contain a highly important spiritual significance. It may, however, be observed, that what Jesus says of this stone is equally true of any other stone. A man falling on any stone, if the fall be of sufficient depth, will be broken; and a man upon whom any stone of a sufficient weight may fall will certainly be ground to powder, pulp, or whatever a crushed human being may be called. Is it not the fate too, of all of us, believers or unbelievers, to return, physically at least, to dust?

Some commentators pronounce this a very fine and impressive verse. We are sincerely grieved, Reader, to have here to again own our inability to perceive either of those asserted qualities. This verse reminds us strongly of a previous saying of Jesus concerning putting a millstone around a man's neck and drowning him in the depth of the sea. There is a certain amount of vigour in both sayings; but both are failures in their apparent purpose of being impressive and terrible. For if a man is to be killed at all, or drowned at all, it is not an aggravation, but a distinct assuagement for the process to be as instantaneous and effectual as possible.

Theologians who declare the stone in question to be Jesus himself, expatiate freely upon what is meant by a man falling upon him and being broken; and what by Jesus falling upon a man and grinding

him to powder. It is evident that such imagery is as available for one set of views as for another; and as in all like cases, professed elucidations are vain and unprofitable.

These disputations between Jesus and his Father's chief priests are not edifying, however we think of them. The thought of our Creator arguing with his own chief priests and failing to convince them is not pleasant to dwell upon.

45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

Yet these disputations have their pathetic aspect also. The struggle between the adherents of an old faith and the embracers of a new faith, is a very ancient, a very familiar, and a very sad spectacle. And the merit of adhering to an old creed, and the merit of siding with a new one, are sung by religious apologists in entirely different keys, according to the immediate purpose in hand. Each is a glory, each a crime.

Never, perhaps, was this better exemplified than when, three centuries ago, the Christian faith was cleft in twain. Then were seen in the house of faith itself, adherents of the old and advocates of the new form of even the self-same faith, struggling against each other with that vehemence and animosity nothing save religious hatred can produce; each section, whenever it was strong enough, freely and avowedly martyring and suppressing the other.

So complete in all the leading nations of the world is the triumph of toleration, that even the fiercest religious antagonisms can now survey each other with composure. Blessed be the memory of the brave men whose noble thoughts and noble lives have secured to us for ever this glorious boon.

It appears these chief priests and Pharisees had begun to perceive that some of the disagreeable portions of Jesus' parables were intended as allusions to themselves. Instead of being alarmed at what they had heard, they were simply incensed and "sought to lay hands on" Jesus; all which unmistakeably shows us what their real estimate of him was. The inane allegations of some Christian apologists that these men could see very well that Jesus was a divine being, but would not own the fact, may well be left to those who can picture men attempting to "lay hands" on a divine being believed by them to be such. Such a conception must pre-suppose these men to have been demented, of which there is not the slightest evidence.

46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

From this attempt to lay hands upon him Jesus was, we read, saved by the fear which these chief priests entertained—very temporarily as we shall see—of the multitude, which it seems at this time mistook Jesus for a prophet. There is surely something very humbling, even from a Christian standpoint, in reading of our Creator being taken for a prophet. Even that modest estimate of Jesus by the multitude proved to be but a very transient one. A few days after this we are told that “all the people” were clamouring for Jesus to be put to death.

MATTHEW XXII.

MUCH uncertainty exists as to whether this ought to be regarded as a continuation of the preceding incident or not. The phraseology of this verse certainly suggests connection. “And Jesus answered and spake unto them again—and said.” This expression, which is quite a tautological curiosity, certainly gives one the impression that what follows is a continuation of and a rejoinder to something preceding. On the other hand, the last verses of the last chapter seemed to bring the incident dealt with to an obvious termination; and it is practically impossible to think, after what is there recorded, that Jesus continued to address these chief priests, and that they continued to listen to him.

How much these Gospels would have gained by being written in an even ordinarily clear style, everyone studying them must constantly feel; for, as everyone may see, Christian commentaries upon them simply abound in confessions of the difficulties and uncertainties they continually present.

Before proceeding with our thoughts upon the parable now before us, we cannot help, Reader, unburdening ourselves by saying that we are becoming entirely wearied with the things the kingdom of heaven is “like unto.” This Gospel history began with the declarations of John and of Jesus that this kingdom of heaven was at that time “at hand.” We are now nearing the

CHAPTER XXII.

1 *The parable of the marriage of the king's son.* 9 *The vocation of the Gentiles.* 12 *The punishment of him that wanted the wedding garment.* 15 *Tribute ought to be paid to Cæsar.* 25 *Christ confuteth the Sadducees for the resurrection:* 34 *answereth the lawyer, which is the first and great commandment:* 41 *and poseth the Pharisees about the Messias.*

1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

2 *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,*

end of the Gospel history, and yet we have to own that we have not gathered one single distinct idea of what this kingdom really is, nor even of where it is; whilst of what it is "like unto," we have simply a recollection of a set of surely the strangest and most incongruous similes that could possibly have been used to set forth and illustrate a supposedly grave and momentously practical subject.

Most sincerely do we say that our own incapacity has suggested itself to us, as it may to others, as an explanation of our failure to gain any knowledge concerning this kingdom of heaven; but when we find that the ideas of other commentators on the subject are palpably as hazy as our own, some more general solution of the matter is clearly called for.

Half the words—aye less—used to enunciate the string of queer analogies which purport to set the kingdom of heaven before us in this Gospel, would in plain language have given men a clear and straightforward account of that kingdom; where it is, what it is, and all its more important features. Apart from the wearisome circumlocution of parables and everything of the nature of them, their obscuring character was admitted by Jesus himself, who tells us that it was for that very reason he expressly chose the medium of parables in speaking to the people, so that though hearing they might be none the wiser.

Had it been the very object of Jesus to give hearers an unfavourable and unpleasant impression of the kingdom of heaven and its king, it is not easy to see how he could more effectually have done so than by such a parable as the one before us.

A certain king had made a marriage for his son; and sent his servants to bid the guests to the wedding. 3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come. "And they would not come." The only supposition that can impart the remotest appearance of probability to the unanimous refusal of his invitation by all those who were bidden to his son's marriage by this king is that he must have forfeited the esteem, and apparently the respect even, of every one of his guests. A supposition that the remainder of this parable certainly renders a very proper and reasonable one.

This king, as might be augured from his general character, was not possessed of fine feelings. He accepted 4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, the universal slight put upon him, and sent

Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and *my* fattings *are* killed, and all things *are* ready: come unto the marriage.

other servants to see the desired guests again, with instructions to coax the latter to his feast by descriptions of what he had prepared for them. For the moment we cannot help feeling some pity for this king. When a king or any other man is pictured as supplicating his guests to come, and as alluring them by descriptions of his hospitality, he is indeed an object of commiseration. The account here given of the king's preparations for the feast shows us that he was no ascetic; but that he had provided according to the heavy, lavish notions of hospitality current in the East, and only too often prevailing in the West also.

These second invitations proved equally vain. And here is disclosed the only pleasant feature in this king's character. His invitations had been given to men of modest standing, to farmers and to tradesmen; in this point very honourably differing from the common practice on occasions of the kind, when, as a rule, none but eminent men or those thought to be so are bidden.

Here we have a picture whose wild grotesqueness and utter unnaturalness is astonishing even in this parable. Some of these bidden guests, not content with refusing their invitations, laid hold of the messengers, maltreated them, and slew them. The notion of men's killing those who had come simply to invite them to a wedding feast is too extravagant to amuse us even.

On learning the result of these second invitations the king, we are told, was wroth; a part of the parable which is any rate natural, and about the only part of it which is. What attitude the king took up to those who had simply made light of his second embassy and proceeded to their farms and their merchandize is not stated; but we read that he at once took vengeance, and very justly, upon those guests who had murdered his servants. He did so however in very barbaric style. Instead of bringing these individual offenders to justice, he sent his armies and "burned up their city." Why all the other citizens of this city and all the women and children should thus suffer for the misdeeds of "the remnant" is, of course, not stated.

5 But they made light of *it*, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated *them* spitefully, and slew *them*.

7 And when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

The despatch of his armies and the burning of the city by this king would take up some time. It seems probable therefore we ought to assume that the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. be certain of this. Be this as it may, the wedding is again ready; the oxen and fatlings and all things are waiting; nothing is wanting but guests. How were these to be got?

The king calls his servants again; most likely those who had survived from the previous missions. And first the king declares to these servants that the men he had previously bidden were not worthy; an assertion based apparently upon the refusals he had met with from them, rather than upon any re-estimate of their original merits. As we do not know the reasons which led to the extraordinary and unanimous refusal of the king's invitations by all these bidden guests we are not in a position to offer an opinion on their conduct; except in the case of those who killed the king's messengers, who, unless some provocation was given to them not named in the parable, were flagrant wretches whose original invitation by the king is astonishing. But however unworthy these guests may have really been, one thing is now very conspicuous; the unworthiness was not all on one side as the character of this king very plainly shows us.

Guests this king was determined to have. He accordingly bids his servants to go into the highways and ask all and sundry, everyone they could find, to come to the marriage feast. In this it is not probable these servants would meet with many difficulties or with many refusals. An assembly would soon be got together to which the oxen and the fatlings and other royal preparations would be very welcome. It was a not uncommon practice in the East for the wealthy to call in wayfarers and the poor to partake of their good things; an amiable custom which in many cases was, no doubt, a sincere expression of sympathy and kindness of heart; in many, a mere act of self-complacent patronizing.

In this errand these servants succeeded; the wedding was at last furnished with guests, whose quality we are told was both bad and good. An assembly got together in the way here stated would indeed be a motley gathering; and would have both its pathetic and ludicrous aspects.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

During this strange marriage feast an incident took place of

11 ¶ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment :

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment ? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

which perhaps it is sufficient to say that it is entirely worthy of, and on a par with, the other portions of this parable.

One of the guests thus requisitioned to this feast was discovered to be without a wedding garment ! Now the surprising thing, one would have thought, would have been that anyone of these guests thus suddenly impressed to the feast should have had such an article as a wedding garment at all ; unless we suppose them to have been provided therewith by their host himself according to a

common Eastern practice, in which case it does not appear how it came to pass that this odd luckless wight did not receive one also.

Now when we remember that the other guests, both "bad and good," had wedding garments on, the wearing of that garniture cannot possibly be taken as any criterion of merit. The absence of a wedding garment in the case of this offender, however it came about, must have been taken by the king as an act of disrespect simply, for except on this point of attire we do not read that this individual had misbehaved himself in any way.

It is quite intelligible, when we think of the thwartings he had experienced, that this king would not be in the best of humours, and that he would be particularly susceptible to any further slight he might meet with, real or imaginary. Hence he became very angry on observing this odd guest without a proper robe on, and took him to task. On hearing the king, the offending guest, we are told, was speechless. Either his crime appalled him, or fear of the king's displeasure terrified him ; the latter being much the more likely of the two.

This dreadful criminal was dealt with very severely ; in a manner, indeed, quite worthy of the royal city-burner. He was not merely expelled from the assembly and from the feast ; he was also treated with contumely and with cruelty. For he was ordered to be bound hand and foot and cast outside into the darkness ; his predicament as we thus picture him outside, unable to stir a limb, being one to move the pity of the harshest. Whether the king relented or the poor fellow remained as he was indefinitely we are not told ; nor do we read whether the feast passed off successfully

or not. Let us hope there were no further mishaps of the kind just related, and that the king enjoyed the company of his guests both bad and good, and they his. One thing, however, has become clear. We have now seen enough of this king to understand the unanimous refusal of his invitations by the first guests. And the kingdom of heaven, Reader, is likened to the above king!

We shall make no attempt to decipher the spiritual meaning of this parable. Any lesson or "moral" conveyable by such a medium, or ascertainable therefrom, can well be spared. Those who may wish for a spiritual exegesis of this lovely little allegory will find in Christian commentaries what purport to be elucidations of it; but which are in reality glosses, in which the parable itself is covered over with and lost under a copious coating of religious verbiage.

Our author here gives us a very naive statement. The Pharisees were so little impressed with what they had heard Jesus say, were so entirely unsuspicious that his wisdom was superhuman, that they had a debate amongst themselves "how they might entangle him in his talk." And they decided that they would—evidently believing that they could—thus entangle Jesus. His previous replies, so far from awing these Pharisees by their manifest supernatural power and wisdom, can hardly have struck them as very astute or profound even, if they thought or hoped that they could entangle or perplex Jesus with such a very old-fashioned "difficulty" as the one they took steps to propound to him.

To carry out this purpose the Pharisees sent some of their disciples together with the Herodians to submit to Jesus the "entangling" question given in the next verse. Who or what these Herodians were is not known. Though we possess most voluminous and minutely detailed accounts of the Jewish history and of the Jewish affairs of this period in secular history, no mention can be found of Herodians, whose existence is known to these Gospels alone.

Never surely was a nation so distracted with rival sects as "my people Israel." And with the Jews these diversities were not simply of a philosophical and merely contemplative kind, such as prevailed in Greece and other ancient nations; they were of such a nature as from their inevitable practical bearings to place men in a position of acute hostility to each other.

15 ¶ Then went the Pharisees, and took council how they might entangle him in *his* talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men.

The mention of a body so obscure and unknown as the Herodians serves to strongly bring to mind again the conspicuous absence from these Gospels of that great Jewish sect whose existence and whose importance are so shown to us in secular history—the Essenes: one of the chief sects of the Jews. Their suppression in these Gospels is complete. Never once do we hear of any of the Essenes waiting upon Jesus, though the resemblance, nay the identity, of many of his own teachings with theirs is complete, often startlingly so. Jesus, of course, knew all about the Essenes, and so, we do not hesitate to assert, did our author and the authors of the other Gospels. The non-mention of Essenism in these Gospels is a problem not difficult to solve. The Essenes had anticipated and already taught too many of the better portions of Jesus' teachings to be altogether agreeable to his biographers.

When these disciples of the Pharisees and these Herodians reached Jesus they began the object of their errand by paying him a very long and very great compliment. There was nothing specially deferential in the term teacher, or master, as it is here given, with which these men saluted Jesus; but what they proceeded to add, that Jesus was true and taught the way of God in truth, and that he cared not for any man nor regarded the person of men, was a piece of homage indeed, which, however, the errand of these men shows us must be taken largely, if not entirely, in an ironical sense; as, in short, a piece of raillery. This salutation is so unlike the usual accostings of Jesus by the Pharisees that we may probably set it down to their Herodian colleagues, of whose principles we have no knowledge.

Eighteen centuries and a half ago when this conversation took place, Judea was a subjugated country. The Romans had conquered it, made it part of their Empire, and unquestionably governed it in many respects in a harsh and overbearing manner. How repugnant, how painful, such a state of things must have been to every patriotic Jew is very evident, and is attested by the many efforts made to throw off the galling Roman yoke.

Is it right to obey a foreign conqueror, or should he be resisted and freedom and self-government restored? This is a question and a practical problem that has abounded in human annals both before and since the time of Jesus. And it is a question which the best of men have always answered, and the enlightened portion of

17 Tell us therefore,
What thinkest thou?
Is it lawful to give tribute
unto Cæsar, or
not?

the human race would now unanimously answer, to the effect that foreign conquest must be resisted and self-government re-asserted.

Whatever we may think of the immediate purpose with which the question was submitted to Jesus, the question itself was in every respect a most serious and grave one; and in many minds a most active and burning one. To ask Jesus his decision on this momentous question was in itself a very natural and proper thing. Indeed, as put to Jesus, the inquiry had a peculiar appropriateness, for was he not King of Jerusalem and son of David? And it is quite possible some of these interviewers, though unaware of the immaculate conception and of Joseph's royal lineage, may have heard Jesus accosted as son of David when entering Jerusalem a few days previously.

They therefore ask Jesus, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not?" "What thinkest thou?"

Our author assures us that Jesus "perceived their wickedness."

¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

That to submit a thorny question to an opponent is wickedness, is evidently a matter of opinion, concerning which we are not able to agree with our author's view. That Jesus

perceived the purpose with which these men put the question before him is believable enough, for it was as palpable as anything could possibly be. And the comments and laudations indulged in on this verse by some commentators to the effect that the divine searcher of hearts could read the thoughts and purposes of these enemies are nothing short of ludicrous as applied to something so self-evident.

"Why tempt ye me?" As we have seen throughout this Gospel, inquiries put to Jesus are habitually denominated temptings. It is not necessary to inquire what was meant by the term; what degree of guilt or impropriety was considered to exist in questioning Jesus. For it is evident he was under no obligation to answer the questions put to him. In the case now before us, for example, any entanglement was altogether voluntary. Jesus might have refused to answer the inquiry at all, as he did when asked for a sign from heaven, or for his authority in the temple; or he might have returned an answer of an indefinite kind as he so often admittedly did.

"Ye hypocrites." Commentators, who are very severe on the falsehood as they term it of the ironical compliment with which

these disciples of the Pharisees and these Herodians began this interview, declare this exclamation of Jesus to be a severe castigation thereof, which must have made those men wince. It is astonishing what a sin a piece of banter can be deemed to be by commentators who themselves own their belief that Jesus himself sometimes spoke in irony, and who are quite certain he so spoke of the "righteous who needed no repentance." Besides, the salutation *Ye hypocrites!* was, as we know, the customary method of accosting his opponents by Jesus; the ascription of any special significance to it in this instance is of highly doubtful validity.

"Shew me." The purpose of this singular request on the part of Jesus is not ascertainable. The suggestions

19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

that have been thrown out upon the point vie with each other in insipidity, and in that only.

As it was not possible to show Jesus anything in the real sense of the word, the problem is to suggest in what way the production and examination of this Roman coin threw any light on the subject at issue to the minds of those present—a problem which still awaits a plausible solution.

Upon a penny being produced, Jesus asks, "Whose is this image and superscription?" Jesus, of course, knew

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

quite well whose image and what superscription adorned the coin he was inspecting. But theologians tell us that Jesus asked questions

and sought information in a nominal and verbal verse only, with the object of leading up to something he wished to say; for omniscience possessed the immense convenience of knowing beforehand the exact reply which would be made to any question asked.

In reply to this inquiry of Jesus, they say that the image on the coin was Cæsar's. Most likely it was a por-

21 They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

trait of the particular Cæsar who did Judea the distinguished honour of at this time reigning over it; and whose manner of discharging his exalted functions had been for some years

past to live on a small island in the Mediterranean, and there carry on orgies that were a reproach to humanity.

After these preliminaries we arrive at last at the famous deliverance, the memorable piece of wisdom given upon this great subject

by Jesus, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." The panegyrics that have been lavished on this saying, more particularly in former times, offer an interesting study. Amongst other eulogies, it has frequently been declared to be a transparently divine utterance; anything so sage and so profound could never have originated in a mere human mind.

When we remember that this saying of Jesus has received praise as a wise and excellent one from many non-believers also, it is undeniably depressing, Reader, to own, as we have to own, that we have pondered upon and searched this saying in vain for the evidences not only of its superhuman character but of its asserted practical wisdom even.

We are not much concerned at our inability to discern the divine character of this utterance of Jesus. The gorgeous hues seen by piety in things connected with the object of devotion are admittedly far more subjective than objective in their origin; for they are found in connection with false religions just as with the true one. Not only, for example, are the homely bits of real wisdom to be found in the Koran resplendent in the eyes of the faithful, but even things therein that are not wise are revered as of unsearchable value.

Our incapacity to perceive the practical and intrinsic value of this celebrated saying of Jesus is more discouraging. And yet we are not alone; for many others have also recorded their inability to perceive any illumination in this saying. Perhaps, too, we may plead that we live in times when the entire category of adages, maxims, aphorisms, and "wise-sayings" has undergone a very serious but a very proper depreciation in men's minds generally.

"Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's." It is evident enough, as indeed is seen from a comparison of one of these Gospels with another, that these Gospel records of the dialogues between Jesus and his opponents are mere fragments of what took place. The word "therefore" in this phrase may reasonably be supposed to refer to something that had been said but not here recorded. It is impossible to see any "therefore" in what is given as preceding this saying. For surely the notion that coins belong to the monarch whose image they bear, or that the circulation of his own coinage in a subjugated country by a conqueror is

a valid title to sovereignty may be dismissed as too childish for discussion.

The real question at issue was, What things in Judea were Cæsar's? What iota of real right of any kind had a Roman conqueror in Judea at all? What was there that good and patriotic Jews could recognize as Cæsar's rights, and therefore "render" to him? Cæsar was in Judea by means and by virtue of brute force; by the strength of the Roman legions, and by that alone. It was not pretended that Cæsar was in Judea by the will of the people or by any other moral title. It is impossible to perceive a shred of anything that could justly be termed "Cæsar's" at all in reference to or bearing upon the question raised by these Pharisees and Herodians.

The admission of Cæsar's "rights" in Judea, the acknowledgment of Roman authority in his own native land which is involved in this answer of Jesus, is a spiritless recognition of foreign domination that does Jesus little credit and little honour. Precisely the same attitude was displayed in the tribute-money impost incident, where "lest we offend them" was the only principle—if such it can be called—assigned for compliance therewith. "Resist not evil" is the foundation underlying the attitude of Jesus in both cases.

In these days, when the principle that the consent of the governed is the only real and true foundation of government is accepted in all enlightened countries, and towards the triumph of which so many eminent Christians have nobly contributed—thus showing themselves better than their creed, as happily men everywhere so often do—it is no longer necessary even to discuss the supposed right of a governor to rule a nation against its wishes.

It is not a little curious to reflect, Reader, that the Jesus who here preached acquiescence in the foreign conquest of his country was—by hypothesis—the same Jesus who had so often in times past mightily assisted Judea to resist and throw off foreign conquest. In the days when Jesus was the God of Battles, when the Lord was a man of war, did he not even stay the Sun and the Moon that Judea might more effectually vanquish her enemies? Any fixed principles in heaven's dealings with its favourite people are as untraceable as they are with other peoples.

As a general proposition the saying, "Render unto Cæsar the

things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's," is a mere truism; for it is palpable that Cæsar and God must, like everyone else, be entitled to what is due to them. In controverted matters between civil and ecclesiastical claims, as in disputes between man and man, nation and nation, and every contested subject whatsoever, to say that we ought to give to each what is due to it is a platitude that does not bring us one iota nearer a solution.

The practical question here raised is, What things in social life appertain to Cæsar, and what to heaven and its supposed representatives; and in cases of dispute how are we to discriminate between the two claims? On this real issue the sonorous phrase we are now considering is not, and never has been, of the slightest practical use; every disputant using it in his own sense, as its open character made inevitable.

Conflicts between civil and ecclesiastical authorities have filled the pages of history ever since Christianity came into the world; and no better comment on the true value of the dictum of Jesus which, it is professed, lays down the relation of the temporal and spiritual, could be desired. In the early times of Christianity, indeed for several centuries after its appearance, the civil powers flagrantly oppressed, often quite suppressed, the just spiritual rights and freedom of Christians. How completely this state of things was afterwards reversed is well known. How Christian authorities suppressed the rights of non-Christians and even of Christians not of the dominant type, and how they intermeddled in the most purely civil matters, until, in the ages of faith, the ecclesiastical powers tampered with everything, from deposing monarchs down to prying into the minutest matters of the daily life of men, history has put on record. Recorded also are the happier facts that since the revival of learning, the dawning of science, the disruption of the household of faith, and the dwindling of religious belief which began four centuries ago and have since continued, ecclesiastical authority has waned and been banished from one intrusion after another, until now, in the principal nations of the world, the recognition of any ecclesiastical authority of any kind is entirely voluntary and completely optional.

In some of the older countries some remanets of ecclesiastical intermeddling still, indeed, remain; and their friction-producing capacities may serve to remind us what the combats of our fore-

fathers over the major spiritual thralls that have now vanished must have been.

In our own country, for instance, ecclesiastical claims long delayed and obstructed, and in a measure even yet hamper, the education of our children; and little things still tramp from one end of a town to the other to get, along with their geography, what their fathers—or more probably their mothers—happen to deem proper religious instruction.

Around the grim subject of burial, where all human distinctions seem for ever ended; where the same visible fate awaits us all alike, and where bickerings are peculiarly painful, ecclesiastical meddlings obstinately linger; and the singular and odious spectacle is still seen of men of the most varied beliefs who lived in the same street in peace, comfort, and even friendship, strictly assorted at death, and duly placed in carefully and sharply classified portions of a common cemetery.

The closed museums and libraries, whose decorous appearance on a “Sabbath” gives a kind of respectability to the adjoining open taverns; and the concubinage of many excellent people, with the bastardizing of their children, arising from the disputed propriety of marriage with a late wife’s sister, still bear witness to the survival in these islands of some curious scraps of a once imposing ecclesiastical domination.

We may also just remark that in this famous phrase of Jesus there is an inherent feature which is greatly to the disadvantage of Cæsar. All things whatever—Cæsar’s things included—are, of course, in a final sense God’s. How much this consideration made against Cæsar in contentious matters; how certain the benefit of a doubt was to be given in favour of the rival claimant to whom everything actually and ultimately belonged, is very manifest.

Astonishment proceeds from causes of so widely different a character, that it would have been interesting to have known the nature of the marvelling felt by these listeners. How far these Herodians and disciples of the Pharisees considered they had been successful in their mission of entangling Jesus cannot be gathered. Some Christian commentators think they had been entirely baffled and defeated by Jesus’ answer, which these commentators pronounce a masterpiece of defensive adroitness, in addition to its greater virtues. Other commentators think, on the other hand, that Jesus

22 When they had heard *these words*, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

conrageously committed himself to the principle that the *de facto* government of Cæsar, however distasteful, was to be respected and obeyed.

When we reflect that in the course of a few days, Jesus was about to leave our planet and return to his heavenly throne, the question of entanglement on such a matter seems altogether immaterial.

The same day a deputation of a very different kind waited upon

23 ¶ The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,

Jesus to obtain light upon a subject far more important even than the one he had just dealt with. A number of Sadducees now came to

Jesus to question him concerning the resurrection from the dead, which they, the Sadducees, did not believe. They therefore propound to Jesus a case illustrative of a difficulty inherent and inevitable in resurrectionism. If the dead were to come back to earth the re-union with survivors would, in many cases, be of an extremely unpleasant kind; and when survivors in such cases eventually rejoin the departed, the meeting must, even in heaven, be a strained and not very cordial one. Still it must be owned that there is no visible reason why in such cases the parties should come together at all on arrival there. It is a place of many mansions.

On sexual subjects the Mosaic code is scarcely readable, many of

24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

its provisions being simply loathsome. The regulation brought before us in this verse is a characteristic delicacy. If a man died childless, leaving a widow, "her husband's brother shall go in unto her," said Moses, "and take her to

him to wife"; the object being, as it is elegantly stated here, to raise up seed unto his brother.

If the case adduced by these Sadducees, whether an actual or an illustrative hypothetical one, may be taken as a guide, the very nauseous "duty," or at any rate legal obligation on this matter, seems to have been strictly discharged. Still even Moses foresaw that there would be men whose feelings would lead them to shirk the obnoxious regulation. The way in which he dealt with such a dereliction of duty is instructive. The widow was to complain to the elders of the city that the brother in question would not perform the obligation laid down. Thereupon the elders were to summon him and speak to this offending brother. "And if he

stand to it, and say I like not to take her, then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed." Whether such penalties secured the general fulfilment of the regulation we do not know. It may, too, be remarked that any reluctance on the part of the widow to have the injunction enforced is not dealt with by Moses. With him woman was a chattel whose inclinations or rights were a factor seldom worth taking into account or even naming.

Though the case seems here given as though it had been an actual one which had occurred to the knowledge of these Sadducees, the extravagant improbability of such a case makes us regard it as a hypothetical one merely; a point, however, which is immaterial for the purpose in hand.

"And last of all the woman died also." After the extensive and monotonous acquaintance with her husband's family this poor woman had

had, it is nothing short of a relief to find from what Jesus says, that it was not to be continued in heaven.

The specific institutions of heaven and hell not having been formulated amongst the Jews until Jesus himself revealed them, the words "in the resurrection" are somewhat vague, and we can form but little notion of what these Sadducees framed

to themselves by that phrase. For though they did not believe in a resurrection of any sort, they no doubt formed some kind of conception of the hypothesis as being to them most probable or least unlikely.

The innumerable forms in which the supposed life after death has been, and had then been, pictured by different peoples and different creeds offer an interesting study; a striking feature of which is the common and prevalent form of representing that new life as being in a great measure a continuation of the earthly life in its main essentials. The more idealized and celestialized forms in which poets and theorists had painted man's future destiny were evidently not in the thoughts of these Sadducees; they were manifestly thinking of the post-mortem existence of man in its more ordinarily current forms, as their question here shows us.

25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother:

26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

27 And last of all the woman died also.

28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

Before considering the answer given to these Sadducees by Jesus, it is impossible not to be struck with its courtesy and gentleness; so markedly in contrast with the tone of the answers given to the more "religious" bodies. These Sadducees are not termed hypocrites; their question is not declared to be a tempting. And the reply thereto made by Jesus has a very marked tone of reasoning and argumentativeness about it; in this widely differing from the stern dogmatic replies given to the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees—the peculiarly religious bodies. This very significant fact has often been remarked upon; and in our comments upon a portion of the next chapter we shall give our thoughts upon it.

"Ye do err." How singularly pleasant this gentle reply feels to be after the "hypocrites," "vipers," "children of the devil," and other acrid accostings we have hitherto met with! And how much truer and how much better our minds and our hearts feel such a salutation as this to be! Yes, Reader, men do indeed err; not Sadducees only, but Pharisees, chief priests, and Christians also. And if there is one happy fact which pre-eminently characterizes mankind in these later ages, it is that we can all now recognize how honest human error may be. Wilful and conscious error ascribed to masses of our fellow men, we now feel to be a monstrous supposition. As we look out into the world and see, not only in religious beliefs but also in other beliefs, how varied are the things held by men to be true, to be proper, and to be natural, we now feel that to ascribe such differences to men's conscious insincerity is as inane as it is uncharitable.

"Not knowing the scriptures." What part of the then existing "Scriptures" taught, or gave any information whatever concerning the resurrection of the dead, Jesus does not point out. Besides, these Sadducees only recognized as genuine Scriptures those of Moses; the rest of the Jewish Scriptures, including the books of the prophets, they did not regard as of divine authority. Even had these Sadducees received the whole of the then Scriptures, we are at a loss to know where they could have gathered any knowledge touching the resurrection therefrom.

How little certainty there is that the study of divine Scripture will yield readers of it the true meaning is a melancholy reflection. The jarring sects of the Jews showed how lamentably little unani-

²⁹ Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

mity the divine Scriptures then existing had produced. And we see from these Gospels how entirely the chief priests, the Scribes, and the Pharisees, in short, all the officials and learned men who had made Scripture their special and peculiar study, failed to understand and grasp the prophets, and thus failed to recognize the Messiah when he made his predicted appearance. How exactly similar has been the result of reading the Scriptures written since this meeting of Jesus and the Sadducees is known but too well.

"Nor the power of God." That these Sadducees did not know the power of God, except in the sense of taking it for granted, they would themselves no doubt have been the first to admit. In the books of Moses, it is true, there are many instances, including some highly curious ones, of the display of the power of Jehovah; but of what he did to men after death, either Jews or Gentiles, we are not aware that any clue is vouchsafed in those books. Little did these Sadducees suspect that it was this same Jehovah who was now speaking to them.

Having thus reminded these Sadducees of their errors, or more correctly, of their ignorances, Jesus proceeds to divulge a specific though negative item of information concerning our existence after death. After we leave here there is no more marriage; men do not marry and women are not given in marriage in the next world. We have to own, Reader, that we feel a helplessness to express our thoughts and feelings as we reflect upon this fact; we cannot even say whether we are conscious of satisfaction or of regret. We are warm advocates of the marriage-tie in this world, and hope there may be nothing to prevent the re-union or companionship in heaven of those who have loved and lived with each other here. But we must sorrowfully own that there are many marriages here whose prolongation in another world is not to be wished for.

"In the resurrection." It is noticeable that Jesus uses the same phrase that the Sadducees had used; and if we take the words in their strict sense, we should inevitably gather that there is no marriage either in heaven or in hell. The same liberation or bereavement, as it may be variously considered, befalls the "few" and the "many" in this matter. Marriage apparently ceases not only with the elect, but also with all of us who find our way to the main destination of humanity.

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven,

It is, however, evident that though Jesus may have meant by the words "in the resurrection" both the agreeable and the horrible portions of that event, he was referring in what follows to resurrection as applied to heaven only. A reference to this answer of Jesus, as reported in the third Gospel, shows us not only how impossible it is to regard any of these Gospel accounts of what Jesus said as exact or verbatim ones, but further shows us how precarious his meaning may become when the different accounts given in these Gospels are collated.

There is, then, no marriage in heaven. It would be a somewhat rash inference to make from this that sex altogether disappears in the next world; for apart altogether from the resurrection of our bodies, there are whilst here well marked differences between the souls, or at any rate, the minds of men and of women. The divergence between man's mind and woman's is as well marked as between his hand and hers, or his voice and hers; distinctions not necessarily implying superiorities. On arrival in heaven these masculine and feminine characteristics would, for anything we know to the contrary, continue to exist.

Besides, if we accept the doctrine of the resurrection of the body taught, if not by Jesus, by the greater part of Christendom, the sexual organs and adjustments would obviously be included in such resurrection, and though of no practical utility any longer, they would certainly continue to differentiate us. The resurrection of our bodies is altogether a very curious subject to dwell upon, and not a very pleasing one in many ways. There seems no conceivable purpose in raising up again our stomachs, our livers, and many other portions of our bodies; though if the theory in question be true, they will make their re-appearance along with our eyes, our noses, and our beards. We are told, indeed, that our bodies will be glorified, but we are unable to frame any conception of glorified organs of the kind we have named, still less of others that might be mentioned, and cannot imagine the purpose thereof. The resurrection of the body is in every way a far-reaching theory, involving amongst other things the re-appearance in heaven of all those distinctions amongst our race of black and white, yellow and brown, and of all the racial and national divergencies which have caused us so much trouble here. Re-appear also, if such theory be true, will physical characteristics so justly deplored in this life; things which, though they may not continue to be so in heaven,

were certainly thorns in the flesh here; things which many of us, like Paul, have here been the victims of, but who, unlike Paul, have not felt sure that it was the Lord's doing, but who in fact entirely acquit him of the suspicion.

"But are as the angels." It seems natural to suppose that angels are inherently sexless, though our knowledge of them is unhappily too limited to enable us to affirm this.

It must be borne in mind that these Sadducees did not believe in the existence of angels, devils, or spirits of any kind. This substantiation therefore of what men are like in the resurrection by comparison with beings these Sadducees regarded as non-entities would certainly not be much calculated to persuade them or bring conviction to their minds. Scepticism of the existence of angels is most deplorable. But lamentable as it is, to our thinking, Reader, it is far more than compensated by the non-belief in the existence of devils. For agreeable as it may be to picture the former, it is horrible to have to think of the diabolical beings with accounts of whose ejection, but not destruction, by Jesus this Gospel is so plentifully studded, indeed so teems. Adding together the two unbeliefs we think these Sadducees were on the whole immense gainers thereby.

Jesus supplemented his positive information on the subject of

31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,

32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

the resurrection with a quotation from the book of Exodus; upon which quotation he founded a very quaint piece of deductive reasoning. The quotation was a very familiar one; the number of times Jesus had declared himself through Moses to be the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob being very great.

The continued existence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we have already seen; for many Christians from the East and from the West are now enjoying, or have the promise of enjoying, the honour—if they regard it as such—of sitting down in heaven with those three worthies.

Upon this Scripture quotation Jesus founds, or to it he affixes, a very wide proposition. "God is not the God of the dead but of the living." God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God is not the God of the dead but of the living; therefore those three patriarchs must still be living.

Whilst we at once accept this reasoning as far as Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob are concerned, the question obviously presents itself, to what extent are we warranted in pursuing the argument? The number of individuals of whom Jesus had specially and explicitly declared himself to be the God is very limited, and would not carry us far. Are we justified in applying the argument to those of whom Jesus had declared himself the God in a more general sense? He had often declared himself the God of Israel for example. Is the deduction that "my people Israel" all continue to exist a sound one?

In olden times Jesus was not the God of the heathen, or of the Gentiles; not so, at any rate, in the sense in which he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or of Israel generally. It seems therefore very uncertain whether the heathen myriads who had existed up to that time ought to be considered as still "living."

Since the children's bread has been cast amongst Gentiles, the Godship of Jesus has been much extended. Our heavenly Father, who is now no respecter of persons—on racial or national grounds at any rate—may now in some sense be taken as the God of the whole human family. Still it is not the special sense in which he was God of the three patriarchs, or of the Israelites; hence the inference as to the continued "living" of the entire human race does not feel altogether as certain as might be desired or feared.

We find too in the Scriptures to which these Sadducees were referred that Jesus or Jehovah is occasionally, though rarely, termed the God of all the earth. It appears to us that those amiable philosophers who have contended for the immortality of all animated beings, as well as of man, may find in this disclaimer by Jesus of being the God of dead beings, a very powerful re-inforcement of their theory.

To us, Reader, it is not a little singular that Jesus did not remind these Sadducees of that proof positive of the resurrection of the dead he had, according to the fourth Gospel, just conspicuously afforded by the raising up of Lazarus and the recall to earth of his soul; an act that had, according to that last Gospel, just caused so much commotion in Jerusalem as to lead to a council of the Jews being called to consider it. And an act that with all deference we do not hesitate to declare was worth more for establishing the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead

than a whole bookful of arguments such as those here given to these Sadducees.

It appears that a multitude had listened to what had just taken place between Jesus and these Sadducees; and, says our author, "they were astonished at his doctrine." Again, we are entirely unable to gather in what sense these people were astonished at Jesus' doctrine; whether they were favourably or unfavourably impressed with it; whether they thought it fine or foolish. All we can certainly learn from the expression is that Jesus' doctrine was new or unusual to these people.

We do not know, Reader, whether the ease with which in these Gospels a multitude was astonished with a dogmatic statement, or the difficulty with which they were stirred by a miracle is the more incomprehensible and the more lamentable.

It is very observable that we are not told what the effect of Jesus' wisdom was upon these Sadducees. Were they also astonished? Our author tells us in the next verse that Jesus had put them to silence; but that these Sadducees shared that opinion may well be doubted. It would have been interesting to know what these Sadducees thought of what Jesus had said to them; how far they were satisfied or dissatisfied therewith. Our own impression is that they had not heard anything very likely to shake their previous convictions.

These Gospels rarely favour us with even the smallest rejoinder to the answers of Jesus. Time and again men come to ask him questions—usually, though not always—sensible and proper ones; on the whole far more sensible and important ones than those put to Jesus by his own disciples. On hearing the answers made to them by Jesus, these varied interviewers are represented as sometimes retiring in anger. But usually they are pictured on hearing Jesus' replies as being discomfited; as collapsing; as feeling themselves routed and silenced. How little probability such a picture carries on its face is palpable enough.

For calmly reading and weighing these replies of Jesus, what is there in them to make men wince, or flee, or be dumb, or feel or do anything unusual? There is nothing in them to disconcert or amaze anyone even. And we will here record, Reader, in accordance with the purpose of this work, that we are honestly unable to discover in these replies of Jesus to the questions put to him

anything calculated to greatly impress men in any way whatever. How often rejoinders to the replies of Jesus would have been desirable even if only for the purpose of clearly showing how celestial wisdom operated on men at first hand, is evident to everyone.

The precise meaning, or indeed any meaning, of the first of these verses is difficult to make out. It appears, however, that the appalling and complete crushing inflicted by Jesus upon the Sadducees had left just sufficient courage in the heart of one Pharisee, who was a lawyer, to submit to Jesus yet another question.

34 ¶ But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, *which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

The question submitted to Jesus by this lawyer is, as usual, termed a tempting of Jesus; though anything more mild and innocent

than what is here propounded by this lawyer could not be imagined. In what is here asked there is not a trace of any entanglement, of any dilemma or supposed dilemma; it is an inoffensive query which any person might well ask of or debate with another. The ascription of malicious intent to this lawyer is evidently due to our author's prejudice; as may be clearly seen from the account of this occurrence in the next Gospel, where Jesus praises this lawyer and declares he is "not far from the kingdom of God."

Jesus replied to the lawyer's question by quoting the commandment here given from what appears to have been a favourite book with Jesus—the book of Deuteronomy. To love God with all the heart, all the soul, and all the mind (or might as it appears in Deuteronomy itself) is the first and great commandment.

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

Theism of some kind is the beginning of most religions: this answer of Jesus has therefore a certain scientific appropriateness. In every theistic religion it is obvious that love, or fear, or a mixture of both, to its given deity is and must be the first and the main factor; all the remaining portions of such a religious system are simply accessories to the one end of worshipping and propitiating its God.

Into the general question of theism this is not the place to enter. It is obvious that belief in the existence of a deity varies in different men all the way from assured conviction of such existence on the

part of some down through every grade of lesser certainty and of uncertainty, to absolute disbelief of such existence on the part of others. How greatly such diverse states of conviction regarding his existence must affect the possibility of feeling love towards a God is very manifest.

Putting aside for the time being non-believers in and doubters of the existence of a deity, and confining ourselves to those who believe or who own such existence, it is evident that the possibility of loving God depends altogether upon what we may believe of his character and nature. Any kind of God may be feared, and any kind may, as we know too well, be obeyed and worshipped; but it is not possible to love any kind. It is only possible to truly love one kind, that is a good one.

From the surface of our revolving planet there proceed daily streams of human homage to the most varied deities. And though from Christendom there proceeds the worship of nominally the same Being only, the various Christian conceptions of that Being have often little in common; some of such conceptions being as repulsive as others are loveable. The holders of the former class of conceptions may, and doubtless do, carry out the command to "Fear God"; it is only possible to the holders of the latter class to carry out this "first and great commandment" to love God. How far it is possible for even these latter to love God with all the heart, soul, and mind upon so slender an acquaintance seems a very open question.

Jesus thus declares that the first of human duties is to love God—which according to ordinary Christian teaching means himself—with all the heart, soul, and mind. It is not needful to make out what is precisely meant by the three terms thus quoted; the phrase is obviously an attempt to roughly and energetically summarize human capacities. Those who think there must be in such a phrase much divine wisdom and illumination may find in theological works endless efforts to extract it.

This command is evidently a counsel of perfection, the extent of possible compliance with which offers a very debatable subject. How far love is possible at all from us to an invisible, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Being is an initial point of difficulty. We are inclined to think that, given a certain degree of belief in God's existence, and certain conceptions of his character, it may be feasible to entertain something in the resemblance of love for him,

though such a sentiment would, no doubt, be largely mixed with other feelings. The injunction to "Fear God," and most of the various commands to obey him are, we should think, much less difficult of compliance.

Perhaps, Reader, we may be allowed to say that for ourselves, we think we could greatly love a good God, of whose existence we felt very sure; but that we cannot love the Jewish Jehovah, and still less the heavenly Father who intends to place any of our fellow men into a furnace of fire.

Jesus not only answered this lawyer's question as to which was

³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

"the great commandment in the law," but also proceeded to declare which was the second; and which he states to be like unto the first.

This second of human duties is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Though this command is a hyperbole, compliance with which is in its strict sense hopeless, the object and tendency of it are admirable indeed. It is the very best thing contained in the whole books of Moses, and does something towards helping us to forgive the many unneighbourly commands with which those books unhappily abound.

The virtue of humanity, of kindly feeling towards and love of our fellow men, is one that so transcends all other virtues, that we frankly own, Reader, we cannot give it second place even to the love of himself which Jesus places first. With love of Jesus—or of God, by those who do not regard them as synonymous—we have no quarrel whatever, except in so far as it may—and as some forms of the sentiment have copiously done—prevent, lessen, or displace that love of our fellows which is so much more urgent and so much more needed. For though God may require our love, he does not need it; whereas our fellow men do. It may be hoped, and it may be believed, that this and many other maxims of a like tendency may have done something towards mitigating that selfishness which has always been, and even yet is, far too prominent in human affairs. In these later times, if we do not love our neighbour as much as we ought, there prevails generally amongst men a far more neighbourly spirit than ever before. Altruism influences the actions of the best men greatly, and of most men not inconsiderably; and if a scientific study of the subject shows us that the selfish and competitive propensities are necessary in a world like this, it shows us also that they are not

in many things nearly so necessary as was once thought. Just as in the realm of thought, opinion, and belief toleration, aye even true forbearance and charity, have replaced the unneighbourly persecution once thought indispensable, so in social and industrial matters rivalry is being replaced by co-operation and organization, and competition gradually reduced to the more modest dimensions in which it may be recognized as inherently a good. And there are many indications which assure us even amid discouragements that the triumph of the brotherhood of man over the national, racial, and social antipathies which have wrought such untold mischiefs in the past is, however often it may be deferred, inevitably approaching.

Jesus further adds in reply to this lawyer, that upon the two commandments quoted "hang all the law and the prophets." It is certainly impossible to conceive anything in laws or in prophecies that would not in some way come under the capacious headings of duty to God and duty to man. How far the Mosaic law and the Jewish prophets helped to further the love of God we will not offer any opinion; but of the aid they lent in furtherance of the love of mankind, we are grieved to have to confess a very meagre estimation.

In the third Gospel there is recorded as having taken place in the earlier part of Jesus' public career an incident so extremely similar to the one we have been here considering, as to lead to the suspicion that it must be the same occurrence, though so very differently placed. As we have already remarked, a collation of the third Gospel with this shows us events so intermixed and transposed, that any attempt to place them in chronological sequence is entirely vain.

In the third Gospel we find the following incident narrated. "And behold a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

He said unto him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?"

And he answering, said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."

And he said unto him, "Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live."

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

We thus see the curious spectacle of the divine wisdom ascribed to Jesus in this Gospel, and upon which we have just been meditating, ascribed to the lawyer himself in the third.

The extremely close resemblance of human and divine wisdom is both flattering and disappointing.

A highly curious incident is laid before us in this paragraph. Jesus now carried the war into the enemies' quarters, and propounded a question to the assembled Pharisees ! And certainly our sense of fairness is gratified as we read this ; it is pleasant to think that the propounding of dilemmas was not all on one side.

In the summaries of contents prefixed to each chapter in this authorized version, we find the present paragraph summarized in the words that Jesus "poseth the Pharisees about the Messiah." Judging from the insipidities offered to us on this subject by theologians, the Pharisees were by no means the only people to whom this divine poser has proved more than a match.

This poser of Jesus consists of four separate questions, which hardly seems quite a fair way of stating even an admitted dilemma ; at any rate for immediate solution. "What think ye of Christ ? whose son is he ?" It can, we think, never be sufficiently regretted that these Pharisees were not given time to answer the first of these two questions separately, and in its broad sense. Few things would have been more instructive than a statement by these Pharisees of the views they entertained on the subject of the Christ or Messiah generally. To the specific question "Whose son is he ?" they reply, "of David" ; a reply whose correctness is set forth, if not demonstrated, in the first chapter of this Gospel ; a thesis, indeed, that chapter is apparently a laboured effort to establish, but which it very effectually goes on to dissipate.

These Pharisees therefore solved the first part of the query put to them ; and solved it correctly. Yet how noticeable and how significant, Reader, is the absence of any confirmation or otherwise of their answer by Jesus !

Now we come to the real poser submitted to the Pharisees. Going upon the assumption given in their answer that the Christ is David's son, Jesus asks how it could be that David could address his own son as Lord, as according to Jesus, he

41 ¶ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ ? whose son is he ? They say unto him, The son of David.

43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

did in the next verse which is quoted from a small Psalm known to us as the one hundred and tenth.

Whether these Pharisees had ever suspected that one of the two Lords in this passage meant the Christ; that this was an address from the First Person of the Trinity to the Second, or whether it was an exegesis they were willing to accept when propounded, we much doubt. It is true theologians tell us this passage was an accepted Messianic one; but what these Pharisees meant by Messianic and what Christians mean thereby are not exactly identical. Anyone now reading the little Psalm of which this passage forms a part, will feel how piercing must have been the vision that could detect therein a ray of Messianic or any other light.

Even accepting the exegesis in question, the assurance of Jehovah to Jesus that he would make the latter's enemies his footstool presents itself no light problem. The promise is not a very "Christian" one, in a certain modern sense of that adjective at least; loving and forgiving enemies being theoretically the true Christian method, not, however, it would seem, binding on Jesus himself. It seems a very open question whether the conversion of Jesus' enemies into his footstool ought to be contemplated as ever to be brought to pass on this little earth of ours. Nearly two thousand years have elapsed since Jesus visited this globe, and but little progress has yet been made towards the conversion of his enemies into his footstool. The great false creeds existing when that visit was made exist yet, and a very powerful new one has also since appeared; whilst the disintegrated state of the household of Jesus' own faith, and the alarming decay of faith itself throughout "Christendom," do not seem to give much promise of any earthly fulfilment of this prophecy.

And worst of all, Reader, Jesus' great enemy—that original enemy who produced and gave birth to all other enemies; that Satan who three years before this had tempted, flouted, and derided Jesus on a pinnacle of the very temple where he was now speaking to these Pharisees—is unhappily not yet put down; nor is there anything to lead us to expect or to hope that that crowning and all-embracing consummation is approaching.

To this fourth and last question these Pharisees did not even attempt any answer. They had replied to Jesus' "What think ye?" by saying they

44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

thought the Christ was David's son. Jesus' rejoinder to their answer, so far as it is possible to trace its meaning at all, is a deprecation of the idea; a raising up of a difficulty in the hypothesis that could not be overcome.

This celebrated question thus remains permanently unanswered. Jesus vouchsafed no solution of it himself; and all efforts since made to grapple with it have failed. It is a question that must be placed along with the two kindred and famous genealogies found in these Gospels, as forming therewith a problem with which the human faculties are quite unable to cope.

Our author tells us that this nonplussing of the Pharisees made men not dare to question Jesus any more; a statement we read both with regret and with satisfaction. Many are the worthy questions that might have been submitted to Jesus, and upon which all would have now rejoiced to have possessed his wisdom. But of questions and answers pertaining to prophecy, or to Jewish matters solely, we are thankful to be spared any further addition.

It need hardly be said that the statement that no one afterwards asked Jesus questions must not be taken in its literal sense. Not only his own disciples, but others also put questions to Jesus during the few remaining days; the famous one asked by Pilate being one which it has often and sincerely been regretted received no answer.

MATTHEW XXIII.

THOUGH it is possible Jesus may have walked away from these Pharisees as he had done before from others, it is more natural to assume that the latter had taken their departure and left Jesus with his disciples and the multitude. How indeed could men tarry who had been discomfited and put to silence in the way recorded at the end of the last chapter?

CHAPTER XXIII.
1 *Christ admonisheth the people to follow the good doctrine, not the evil examples, of the scribes and Pharisees. 5 His disciples must beware of their ambition. 13 He denounceth eight woes against their hypocrisy and blindness: 34 and prophesieth of the destruction of Jerusalem.*
1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

Jesus thereupon proceeded to address the multitude and his disciples at much length; for the whole of this chapter was apparently thus spoken. Of this, however, we cannot be

very confident. In the other Gospels fragments of this address are found in other connections. One large section of it is given in the third Gospel as delivered in the house of a Pharisee who had asked Jesus "to dine with him," an invitation Jesus, we read, accepted. Happy Pharisee! to entertain our Creator at dinner is a lot that has fallen to few mortals.

Jesus began this address to the multitude and the disciples by frankly acknowledging the legal and official status of the Scribes and Pharisees whom he went on to so vehemently denounce. They sat "in Moses' seat" and were consequently the valid and visible representatives of heaven upon our earth. True they were personally hypocrites, vipers, children of hell, and whited sepulchres even; but none the less on that account were they the true religious authorities. They were therefore to be unreservedly obeyed.

In pursuance of this principle Jesus expressly commands this multitude and even his own disciples to observe and do "whatsoever" these Scribes and Pharisees "bid you observe." They were the authorized religious teachers and were to be implicitly obeyed and submitted to.

In enjoining the recognition of Cæsar, though a foreign conqueror of his own and of their native land, upon his countrymen, Jesus had already enunciated in civil matters a principle analogous to the one here laid down in ecclesiastical ones. *De facto* authorities, civil and religious, were to be yielded to regardless of their intrinsic qualities and merits.

There is now no necessity to discuss this principle as a general proposition. The battle of civil and religious liberty is now over and won—no thanks to the Prophet of Nazareth or to any other prophet—in all the principal nations of the world. The only observations we have to make upon this grave injunction of Jesus are as to its bearings upon his own acts, teachings, and religious system.

In the first place it may be observed that this injunction is absolute and unqualified. "Whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." It is true Christian apologists assure us that Jesus meant that whatsoever these officials bid men do was to be obeyed only providing that what was so enjoined was true and in accordance with sound doctrine. But for this assurance

2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat :

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do : but do not ye after their works : for they say, and do not.

these apologists offer no authority except their own. Jesus himself said nothing of the kind. He enjoined this multitude to "do" whatsoever these authorities bid them observe, without adding one single limiting or qualifying word or sentence. And how were people to tell whether what these Scribes and Pharisees bid them observe was in accordance with sound doctrine or not? If they judged something thus officially commanded unsound were they still to do and observe it, or were they to disregard it? Unless the principle of authority is absolute, it is palpably worth nothing at all.

And, Reader, what are we to think of a great teacher who in giving a broad command like the one before us should mean and intend—as is thus alleged—a serious qualification of it affecting its entire import and yet not state such qualification? The way in which Christians ascribe saving clauses and qualifying provisos to the sayings of Jesus in order to bring those sayings into harmony with what they would like him to have said is very pathetic. At the same time it is amusing to notice how angry with each other the different Christians are when such saving clauses happen to be suggested in a direction not liked.

Looking at this very serious command of Jesus in its practical bearings to those who thus heard it, the question at once arises, How was it possible for men to observe and do whatsoever these Scribes and Pharisees commanded and also carry out the teachings of Jesus himself?

When we remember the spirited condemnation of what "them of old time" had taught which Jesus had put forth at the beginning of his career some three years ago, how one after another he quoted Mosaic injunctions only to countermand them and enjoin the very reverse, how could men possibly obey what these Scribes and Pharisees bid them and also obey the contrary teachings of Jesus himself? How, for example, to select a minor matter, could men both "perform unto the Lord thine oaths" and "swear not at all"? Or how, to take one of the very gravest of human acts and duties, could men carry out those laws of Moses concerning marriage and divorce which had, according to Jesus, been given in consideration of the hardness of men's hearts and in defiance of the eternal law of true righteousness and yet carry out also the express countermanding of the same given by himself?

Even granting that the "whatsoever" used in this passage by

Jesus meant whatsoever only was in accordance with the Mosaic law, what then? Were Christians still under that law? Where is the boasted "liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free," if men were still under the yoke of bondage?

Well might this very practical subject cause trouble and division in the infant Church. Directly after the death of Jesus the questions of submitting to Jewish ordinances; of obedience to the law; of circumcision or uncircumcision, became vexed subjects, as well they might. Jesus had counselled both observance and distinct non-observance of Mosaic laws, and had personally complied with circumcision and some other ceremonial institutions. Under such circumstances we cannot wonder that what was considered to be Christian duty on this subject became a serious and perplexing problem. And it is very significant to reflect that whilst James and Peter, who had no doubt heard Jesus say much on the subject that we do not possess, took one side, Paul, who so far as is known had never seen Jesus at all, took the opposite.

Many traces of this ambiguity cling to Christianity even yet. Portions of the Old Testament are stated to be still binding and other portions repealed, without any known principle being assigned as a ground of such discrimination; hence the striking diversities of view and of practice found in the matter throughout Christendom. Speaking generally, the better and cleanly and more convenient parts of the Pentateuch are considered to be still in force, and the uncleanly and obnoxious and inconvenient parts lapsed; no more definite principle of selection being, so far as we are aware, even alleged.

To this memorable command, Jesus adds the caution that the works of these Scribes and Pharisees must not be imitated; "for they say and do not." This latter it is much to be feared is a failing to be found more or less even in the best of teachers; and it may be truly said of these men that their not doing a very large proportion of the law they officially set forth did them very great credit indeed.

And what a momentous and far-reaching principle the one here laid down becomes when applied to Jesus' own Church! That reverence and obedience are due to ecclesiastical authorities however personally depraved and vile they may be, feels much more vivid and startling when brought home to ourselves than when read as enjoined upon some Jews nineteen centuries ago.

The history of Jesus' own chief Church, and of his numerous minor ones also, furnishes us with many instances in which the principle here enjoined by Jesus has been severely put to the test, and of the singular way in which Christians have obeyed and disregarded it respectively.

Peter's chair, like Moses' seat, has had some strange occupants. And the works of pontiffs, bishops, and other successors of the apostles of every sort have often, like the works of these Scribes and Pharisees, been of a nature not to be imitated. It is clear, however, from the principle before us, that this in no way forfeited their right to men's obedience; the authority of these men remained as unimpaired as if they had been irreproachable models.

Yet when the Reformation cleaved Christendom in two, this principle of Jesus was cast aside; the dreadful profligacy of the popes, bishops, and other ecclesiastics, and the lamentable state of convents and monasteries were avowedly assigned by Protestants as a main reason and justification of the great schism. And in the subsequent history of the Protestant section of Christendom, ecclesiastical authority has proved helpless to avert the most extensive disintegration. So extremely fissiparous has the Christian faith proved when "private judgment" has been applied to it, that founders of important denominations have often lived to behold their own true fold rent asunder. The truth is that between absolute obedience to authority and the absolute freedom of human reason there is no possible halting place. Happily, the foremost races of mankind have ceased to seek any such halting place, and have chosen the latter alternative.

Immediately after this memorable command to this multitude and to his own disciples, that they were to yield obedience to the deplorable occupants of Moses' seat, there follows a description in these four verses of these same Scribes and Pharisees which is terse, scathing, and vigorous, and full of happy touches, lifelike, and true to nature. These same men, who were to be heard and obeyed in their official capacity, Jesus proceeds to hold up to scorn and aversion.

The first charge against these occupants of Moses' seat is that "they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and lay them on men's shoulders." The charge thus laid by Jesus at the door of the official religionists of his own time is one that may be justly

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

brought against similar bodies in all ages and in all countries. The oppression which has been exercised upon the human race in the name of religion the world over is simply appalling. And that oppression has been of every kind. Heavy burdens and grievous to be borne have been placed by the spiritual authorities of every creed not only on men's shoulders, but, what is far worse, on men's minds and hearts also. For though the material burdening and extortion exercised in the name of religion has been incalculable, the mental oppression wrought in that name has been even more hurtful and grievous still.

It is melancholy to reflect that Jesus' own system was destined to become one of the greatest, perhaps the very greatest, engines of material and mental oppression that ever existed amongst mankind. During the middle ages the Christian Church became a huge tyranny which overrode civil authorities; amassed fabulous amounts of wealth and lands; stifled science; stamped out in the name of heresy almost every vestige of mental freedom; in short, rendered those ages the dark ages indeed. The Inquisition itself was but a conspicuous exemplification of methods that in a more silent and subtle manner the Church had for centuries used to oppress and keep men obedient.

Jesus adds that the heavy burdens placed by them on men's shoulders, these Scribes and Pharisees would not lift a finger to move. There does not seem much purpose in laying burdens and then removing them. In this point, however, as is well known, Jesus' own authorities greatly improved upon these Scribes and Pharisees. They laid burdens on their flocks, but were open for a moderate consideration to remove them. The open sale of "indulgences," sad enough in its main aspects, is probably one of the most diverting things history records.

This passage is a most felicitous description of religious display.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

And though spoken in the first instance of these Scribes and Pharisees, it is, with the due alteration of local terms, applicable to pious ostentation the world over.

To be seen of men is, Jesus declares, the one motive with these successors of Moses, for "all their works." It is not necessary, it is not possible, to take this declaration in the literal sense of the word "all." How even the worst bodies of men are

not without good qualities and redeeming features, and how in all such bodies some really excellent men are always to be found, is a lesson experience has taught too often ever now to be forgotten. Amongst these Scribes and Pharisees were doubtless many sincere men, who did works of goodness and kindness from worthy motives. But the broad truth of the picture here drawn by Jesus may be none the less freely admitted.

Jesus proceeds to detail some of the methods then in vogue in Judea for the purpose of calling attention to piety. The first two processes to that end which he here specifies were certainly singular enough. Phylacteries were pieces of parchment on which were written Scripture texts, and were worn on the forehead and the left arm; and the borders to garments here mentioned were fringes to cloaks added in accordance with Moses' instructions. Such things were in themselves childish enough and humbling enough; but when we reflect—and this is the point of Jesus' allusion—that the breadth of these phylacteries and the depth of the fringe of these garments were looked upon as the measure of the piety and holiness of the wearers, we almost instinctively ask ourselves if Judea could be a civilized country; for such things irresistibly remind us of certain practices of a like kind on the part of those children of Nature we usually term savage.

The history of ecclesiastical vestments is a very interesting one. The idea of denoting religious status and quality by attire seems to have been pretty universal, for it was found in great abundance even in the Western hemisphere when that hemisphere was first visited. We much doubt, however, if the entire history in question can show anything so truly ludicrous as what is set before us here.

Perhaps it may be said that Jesus' own ecclesiastics have not fallen short in the matter of gorgeous vestments and elaborate garb. This no doubt is true; and even yet in some countries Christian priests distinguish themselves in a way more loud than pleasing. In the case of the principal and most advanced nations of the world however there is to us, Reader, something strangely and deeply significant in observing the modest way, the truly mild and delicate way, in which clerical tailors now so gently distinguish from the rest of us those estimable and scholarly men who in these latter ages pastor the many strange varieties of Jesus' sheep.

To love the uppermost places at feasts, the chief seats in synagogues, greetings in the markets, and to be saluted by titles of

supposed honour, which Jesus now charges against these Scribes and Pharisees, are, it must in fairness be owned, elementary weaknesses of human nature; and potentially, at least, existed therein when Jesus first created our species. We could not honestly express a firm belief that these failings, in their modern forms, may not be found both in Christians and in Agnostics even.

And it cannot be denied that doing works to be seen of men, and scrambling for uppermost places, chief seats, greetings, and titles of honour, real and imaginary, may be found not only in religion, but in most other human affairs as well.

Happily it is nevertheless manifest that in these latter times display of the kind named, and the struggle for "distinctions" of the sort here described, are palpably on the wane in all human affairs; and from the best and happiest of causes. Thanks to many blessed achievements and influences of modern times, the rank and file of mankind are now much more nearly abreast of the upper sections than ever before. Hence forms of display, once influential, now fall dead; and once imposing distinctions impose no longer. Even the real and genuine distinctions amongst men, to which just honour is due, are now everywhere assessed at a more moderate and truer estimate. Even the greatness of truly great men is now valued sensibly and soberly, and the pernicious and preposterous hero-worshipping of past times has practically come to an end. This healthy and salutary decline in men's estimates of the honours, distinctions, and chief seats of the world, and of those who possess them, and also the more sobered valuation of men justly distinguished, in no way, we believe, proceed from a spirit of grudging or of jealousy, but from a very wise and well-founded re-estimate of men and things on the part of mankind generally.

We now come to a paragraph deserving of the very highest admiration. In emphatic contrast to the foolish and vicious conduct and aims of these Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus proceeds to enjoin upon this multitude, and upon his disciples, a line of conduct diametrically opposite. Upon these hearers he enjoins not only certain clear and specific prohibitions, but also the cultivation of a fundamentally different spirit and behaviour from those seen in these Scribes and Pharisees.

⁸ But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.

And first of all Jesus sternly forbids these hearers to suffer

9 And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ.

themselves to be called or saluted Rabbi and Master; and conversely forbids them to call any man father on earth; from which it is clear that honorary titles, or what were thought such, were neither to be received nor given to

others. Happy would it have been if this excellent command had been obeyed.

We may hope, and for anything known to us, we may believe, that the disciples who heard this command, and who, as we have already seen, had heard others to a like effect from the one Rabbi and one Master, faithfully adhered to it. We may well believe that our author would have spurned the "saint" which embellishes his name, and stares us in the face in this "authorized" version; but which in this matter is not "authorized" by the original.

But speaking generally, the successors of these apostles have carried out this exhortation of Jesus—as so many other of his commands have been carried out,—on what may justly be termed the absolute-reverse principle. That many of the commands of Jesus should—in the sense of remaining unfulfilled—be disregarded by Christians is not a matter of surprise, nor in some cases of regret; but it is surprising to note how not a few of those commands are simply and sheerly reversed. So it is in the case before us. Lordship, Eminence, Grace, Father, Father in God, and endless other sounding titles have been the well-known appellations by which the successors of these apostles have been mainly known in the world. And they are the titles—though sadly reduced from their whilom significance—by which Jesus' chief priests are still accosted and accost each other. From the Holy Father who speaks to the world from Peter's chair down to the "Reverend" stripling who is commencing to pastor some village ecclesia, the same singular method of complying with the command of the one Rabbi may be observed.

We are not amongst those who think it necessarily wrong to disobey the Prophet of Nazareth; and we are pleased to see Christians helping the dead to bury their dead, laying up treasures on earth, taking great thought for the morrow, and in many other ways doing what Jesus forbade. None the less do we regret that Christians and all mankind have so little obeyed this and some other wise exhortations of the Master.

The first part of this passage had already been impressed upon

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

the disciples on the occasion when James and John had been seeking precedence over their colleagues.

The latter of these two verses is a noble promise, which it behoves every good man to do all he can to bring to pass. That the self-exalting shall be abased and the humble exalted, is a promise whose fulfilment can in the main only be regarded as, up to the present time, having taken place in the next two worlds; and possibly that may have been Jesus' meaning. But when we remember the confirmation of the old prediction that the meek shall inherit the earth given by Jesus, it seems quite possible to regard the happy state of affairs predicted in this verse as destined to be realized upon our earth. May every good man so help to realize it.

And that such a state of things is, however slowly, being more and more realized in our world is very manifest.

Never before have the self-seeking of all kinds been so nearly appraised at their true worth as now; and never have the meek, when that quality has been the accompaniment of other worthy qualities, been so esteemed and appreciated as now.

The remainder of this long chapter, Reader, offers to commentators a subject of the most painful and disagreeable kind. How distasteful it is even to Christian commentators, their remarks upon it sufficiently betray.

13 ¶ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

From this verse to the end of the chapter is one long, fierce, and apparently continuous outburst of the bitterest invective against the

Scribes and Pharisees. Much reasonable doubt exists whether this address of Jesus ought to be regarded as a continuous discourse or not. The grouping tendency of our author, evident in his own narrative, and still more so on a comparison of it with the other Gospels, has led many to suppose that the following long denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees is a collection of Jesus' sayings regarding them strung together by our author. It is certainly pleasanter to take this view of the rest of this chapter rather than to regard it as an unbroken outpour publicly spoken; and portions of this apparently continuous address found dispersed in the other Gospels make such a view of it not only possible, but highly probable. On the other hand, many defend the supposition that this

is a connected, unbroken denunciation. The matter is not one of any real importance. There are many cases where the connection or non-connection of things may have a great bearing on their import. But this is not a case of the kind. The rest of this chapter is a string of pearls that may be taken singly or in the mass without making any real difference in the total effect or value of them.

The first remark we wish here to make is, that these Scribes and Pharisees were entirely unworthy of the attention and importance given to them by Jesus. It is undoubtedly true that during his sojourn on our planet our Creator entirely confined himself to Jewish affairs; during the thirty years and upwards that he abode on earth, he entirely disdained not only to visit any other people, but disdained to notice or to speak of the affairs of any of the other nations of the world. If that were his pleasure, there is, of course, no use in our complaining. But one thing, Reader, we can and shall do; and that is to express our great regret that objects more worthy, both in merit and in relative importance, of the divine attention than these trumpery Scribes and Pharisees, were not selected. Not in one single conceivable sense were these men worthy of the time and attention Jesus bestowed on them.

If Gentiles and Gentile subjects were not to receive, except in an occasional scornful allusion, the notice of Jesus, he might, at least, have varied his wearisome references to the Pharisees by some remarks upon another famous Jewish sect—the Essenes.

And never surely, according to Jesus' own description of these men, did such dreadful specimens of our species exist as these religious leaders of Israel, these occupants of Moses' seat. Jesus' own permission for Moses' seat to be filled with the human monsters he here delineates simply appalls us, and throws a melancholy light upon that divine guidance, supposed or alleged to be at work in filling the exalted stations on earth. Monarchs and priests are, we are told, appointed by the grace of God. But it is clear, from the instance before us, and from endless confirmations since, that such appointments are by the grace of God only in the sense in which everything else is by the grace of God; that is to say, he graciously permits things to be as they are.

To us, Reader, the difficulty, indeed the impossibility, is to conceive that human beings ever existed so utterly and unreddeemably bad and black as those here pictured by Jesus. We need

not disclaim any sympathy with these Scribes and Pharisees ; for we should be at a loss to name one single point of harmony with their views and actions. There is no historical body of men we can call to mind, with the possible exception of those priests of Jesus' own who founded and worked the Inquisition, whose defence we could less undertake. But these Scribes and Pharisees, like the Inquisitors, are entitled on being judged to have their motives and their surroundings fairly estimated and allowed for. When, as here, we see men impeached as at the same time hypocrites and fanatics, it is not possible to accept such a description in its literal sense. Then, again, the beliefs of these men were entitled to what inherited religious beliefs are always entitled—a real, though limited, respect ; and—as men feel in regard to all inherited faiths but their own—to commiseration also. There cannot be a shadow of doubt that the young Pharisee who shortly after this was breathing threatenings and slaughter against Christians was a typical exemplification of the convictions and feelings animating the Pharisees generally, to the effect that the true faith must be guarded and a pestilent innovation resisted.

“ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” This phrase occurs no less than eight times in this chapter. What was intended by it can only be conjectured. As it was, by hypothesis, uttered by a being able to give effect thereto, the natural presumption is that such woe was positively intended by Jesus to take, and is now taking, effect upon the men it was thus applied to. Some expositors think it is a phrase that partakes of the nature of a bewailing rather than of threatening ; or partakes of both. In the third Gospel we find Jesus declaring woes against several other classes of men. As with the antithetical term blessed, it is possible to take the phrase “ woe unto you ” as a declaration that certain actions inherently produce that given state, or as a distinct avowal of an intention to bring such state about. From what occurs later on in this chapter, it seems impossible to doubt Jesus' fixed intention to inflict the woe in question upon these Scribes and Pharisees as upon the people of Capernaum and others in a place provided for the purpose generally. For these men would almost, if not quite, all be dead before the destruction of Jerusalem, which, in the opinion of some, was the woe here meant.

The first charge in the long list made against these Scribes and Pharisees is a singular one indeed. Jesus declares they shut up

the kingdom of heaven against men; they neither go in themselves, nor allow others that are wishful, to go in. That those men did not enter the kingdom of heaven was of course a matter resting with themselves exclusively; but that they did or could "shut up" that kingdom and thus prevent others entering seems lamentable indeed, and makes us marvel that heaven should thus permit its gates to be humanly obstructed and closed.

The next charge made against these men there is no difficulty in understanding. They "devour widows' houses,

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

and for a pretence make long prayer." The greater susceptibility of women than of men to sacerdotal blandishments and religious influences of all kinds, whether it be looked upon as an excellence or as a defect, is indis-

putable. It occasions us no surprise, therefore, to learn that these successors of Moses devoured widows' houses. They would be much easier to devour than houses where masculine insusceptibility to religious considerations had first to be overcome.

"And for a pretence make long prayer." Of long prayers there can be but one opinion. A man who communes at great length with heaven shows in the first place great presumption, and that is never a good sign. Then, as Jesus has so truly pointed out, God already knows all men need before they ask, and cannot possibly require to listen at any length to any representations from us. The prayers of a good man to a good God would always be short. There is nothing to tell God. The only thing really required is a true spirit; a spirit of true reverence. The celebrated prayer Jesus enjoined men to use is a very short one, and in that sense a model to be imitated.

It may no doubt be pointed out that there is another view of prayer, for which we are sorry to say there is also Scripture countenance. That view is that God is to be importuned and besieged until he grants our requests; that though not inclined at first to grant what is asked he may be teased into yielding. This is not an elevated view of prayer whether scriptural or not; nor does it seem on the face of it a very promising one; still it is a view that would justify very lengthy prayer with those holding it and willing to try its efficacy.

"Shall receive the greater damnation." Devourers of widows' houses, whatever the process of such devouring may have been,

whether spiritual allurements, terrorism, or force, certainly deserve heavy punishment; and if the act has been accompanied with long prayer it is agreeable to learn that extra retribution will be added.

A strange verse indeed is the one now before us. Jesus here

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

accords to these Scribes and Pharisees intense and consuming zeal, which, seeing that in the same breath they are termed hypocrites, is to us not intelligible. How zeal and hypocrisy can be supposed to be compatible and co-exist we do not know.

It may be quite true that a man may, for various reasons, profess a faith he does not sincerely believe; and may expend in its defence and even in its propagation efforts and exertions which simulate the effects of true zeal. But even such cases are not very probable; for hypocrisy is a very paralysing and languid quality. A hypocrite who will compass sea and land to make a convert is an extraordinary hypocrite indeed. As applied to bodies of men such a picture is utterly incredible.

When, after compassing sea and land for the purpose, these men secured a proselyte, they made their unhappy victim, we read, "twofold more the child of hell" than themselves. One would surely have thought that these Scribes and Pharisees had themselves, according to Jesus' description of them, already reached the lowest depths attainable.

A convert to Pharisaism was, it thus appears, twice as bad as an original Pharisee. Converts, perverts, proselytes, apostates, or whatever other name may be given to men who change their faith, are certainly, in spite of some illustrious exceptions, not as a rule the pleasantest of people. There are proverbially in the zeal of a renegade elements of a bitter and not agreeable kind. This is often observable even in the case of sceptics who have undergone only one-half the process; who have not exchanged one faith for another, but have simply thrown one off. These, though not always, have still often shown towards all faiths, and especially the discarded one, an animosity and unreasonable intolerance notably absent in those non-believers who never possessed a religious faith of any kind.

"Child of hell." The true meaning of this phrase cannot be asserted with certainty. According to one great school of Christianity all men, with the exception of the elect, are vessels of

wrath and predestined heirs of the melancholy place here referred to. But "ye make him twofold more" seems hardly capable of being taken in that sense. More probably it means that such a proselyte becomes a doubly potent agent and instrument for serving the purposes of Satan.

Descending from grave charges to very small ones, Jesus proceeds

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor?

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

to upbraid these Scribes and Pharisees for teaching a number of erroneous ideas concerning the respective validity and non-validity of a number of oaths! There is surely something regrettable to see Jesus condescending to deal with such trumpery matters as those here dealt with, which are unworthy of notice, much less of refutation. The supposed differences in efficacy between swearing by the temple and by the gold of the temple, and between swearing by the altar and by the gift on the altar, are notions ill-deserving the time and attention here given to them. For as with endless superstitions and trivialities of a like kind to be found the world over so in

this case, refutation is vain. Minds that can accept such things at all are impervious to disproof. Surely, Reader, the thought of the Creator of the Universe demolishing these pettifogging sophistries is not an edifying subject of reflection.

For their mistaken teachings on this small subject Jesus terms these Scribes and Pharisees blind guides; calls them fools and blind; and denounces woe against them in the same manner as for the serious and real misdeeds previously laid to their charge.

Having disposed of the preceding sophistry of the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus lays down the doctrine that

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

anyone swearing by the altar sweareth by everything thereon; that anyone swearing by the temple sweareth by him that dwells therein; and that anyone swearing by heaven sweareth by God's throne and by God himself. A high degree of importance seems thus attached to swearing by the ecclesiastical apparatus named in the first two of these verses;

as regards the last verse, we should fancy that the full import here

ascribed to swearing by heaven would be the one usually understood by those using that form of oath. It may be remembered that swearing by heaven was one of the oaths specially condemned by Jesus in his sermon in addition to his general prohibition of oaths altogether. How true in every way is the previous saying of Jesus, "Yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil"!

Punctilious observance of the visible requirements of a religion is always a great point with hypocritical professors of it. Hence we learn that these Scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites paid tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin. Tithes of corn and wine and oil did not satisfy their pious souls; they would render to heaven its share of small herbs even. There is in this something that reminds us of the extreme and sometimes ludicrous niceties of religious observance with which so many celebrated knaves veiled their operations; and with which, doubtless, so many others are now veiling theirs. Such of these Scribes and Pharisees as were really hypocrites, we may rest assured, paid special attention to the tithing of mint, and anise, and cummin.

The weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith these Scribes and Pharisees, says Jesus, omitted. Under one or other of those three headings almost all human actions may be placed; and if these men were without judgment, mercy, and faith, or omitted to carry out what was required under those three heads, they were bad indeed. It would appear from the last clause of this verse that the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, as well as the requirements of judgment, mercy, and faith, were to be attended to, however.

Men who omitted matters of judgment, mercy, and truth, even though sound on the matter of tithes, were blind guides indeed. Let us hope that they had few followers. When the blind are led by the blind, Jesus, we may remember, pointed out where both would arrive. Blind guides, even though they sit in Moses' seat, are best disobeyed.

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

To "swallow a camel" is said to have been part of a proverbial expression of the time. It is a relief to think Jesus was not the author of it; and it seems a pity he should have honoured such a vulgarism by quoting it even.

Another exemplification of the deceit of these Scribes and Phari-

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

sees is given. They are careful to clean the outside of the cup and the platter, though within those articles are full of extortion and excess. This is a curious mixture of the literal and the metaphorical. It offers a copious field for

exposition, of which some commentators duly avail themselves.

This homely but excellent advice to cleanse the contents of the

26 *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

cup and the platter first, so that they may be clean both inside and out, was, it is to be hoped, taken to heart by any Pharisee who heard or heard of it.

“Thou blind Pharisee.” As this is the fifth time that blindness is ascribed to these Scribes and Pharisees in this long impeachment of them, it would, if it were possible, be both interesting and important to know what Jesus meant by the term “blind.” The natural and ordinary meaning of the word is, of course, an absolute inability to see. And in this sense, blindness, whether physical or mental, is an involuntary affliction and incapacity for the disabling consequences of which a sufferer is in no way blamable.

Little, if any, blame also attaches to the lesser or partial mental blindness which arises from limited capacity and limited opportunity. Nor does any blame whatever attach to the mental blindness of men resulting from the uncertainty and obscurity of objects looked upon. And the responsibility for the want of true perception is not great, if it exists at all, in cases where an object strikes the visions of different men in widely different ways. How strongly these two latter conditions apply in the case of all religions and religious beliefs is manifest.

But there is undoubtedly another kind of mental blindness, wilful blindness, to which a high degree of guilt and censure justly attaches. It consists in the shutting our eyes to plain facts; the refusal to give a calm and fair hearing to both sides of any serious question; and, worst of all, in seeing things but not owning to the true impression made by them upon us. These things are blamable indeed, and the last is in many departments of human affairs an ignoble and criminal act.

In the unwitting and sincere embracing of error, whether

inherited or acquired, there is no guilt. It is what even the very best of men have constantly done, as history continuously shows us; and as every controverted question of our own day abundantly illustrates. But to bear true witness to his impressions and convictions is the imperative duty of every man. Hypocritical adherence to a truth, though it may even aid that truth in some measure, is odious; whilst erroneous convictions sincerely arrived at and entertained, deserve and receive the respect of all good men.

Christian commentators, it need hardly be said, declare that the blindness attributed to these Scribes and Pharisees by Jesus was wilful blindness. This, however, to say the least, is highly doubtful. Jesus well knew the enormous power of inherited beliefs to obscure, and even distort. With some natures indeed that power is nothing short of literally blinding. Jesus' own testimony, recorded in the third Gospel, that those who put him to death knew not what they did, is the evident truth upon this subject.

It may, too, be pointed out that in Jesus' previous utterances on this point, there are passages bearing both ways; to the effect that men could, and that they could not, see the light. And, indeed, is not the power of men to come to grace of their own accord still, as ever, a standing problem in theology?

For the purpose of again illustrating the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of these Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus uses a simile which, even if exception be taken to its taste, must be allowed to be a very forcible and vigorous one. He compares these men to whited sepulchres, outwardly beautiful, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Unfortunate seat of Moses! It was tenanted by strange beings.

"Full of all uncleanness." We begin to wonder whether these unfortunate creatures had a single good quality or redeeming feature of any kind. It is a popular notion that there never was a human being altogether without; and in actual life we often find striking failings along with striking excellencies. But we begin to think that these Scribes and Pharisees were literally children of hell. Though they plumed themselves upon having Abraham to their father, their real parent, if we may

take an expression ascribed to Jesus in the last Gospel literally, was Satan. But then the difficulty is, how did these children of Satan get into Moses' seat? The diversion the Prince of Evil must have derived from such an exploit is very evident; but how we are to get our minds to dwell upon the divine permission accorded thereto we do not know.

Some Christian commentators take advantage of the expression "all uncleanness" to somewhat meanly ascribe to these Scribes and Pharisees sensuality and profligacy in addition to the already appalling list of their alleged crimes. But the expression is obviously merely an exigency of the simile, and is no sufficient ground for the imputation in question, which finds no support in these Gospels and is negatived by what we know of these men generally from other sources. A real and valid deduction from this "all uncleanness" is to show us the true wisdom of those reformers who would substitute combustion for putrefaction as applied to human remains.

It cannot be irreverent, seeing that man is made in the divine image, to suppose that the law of association of ideas existed in Jesus, as with men generally. There are abundant cases that seem to support this supposition throughout these Gospels. And in the case before us the mention of sepulchres evidently led Jesus to another thought concerning tombs and sepulchres of a quite different and less gloomy kind than the last; a thought of a most pithy and felicitous kind; a rare and happy castigation of a form of hypocrisy yet found, alas! the world over.

Men who were about to take part in killing the prophet of their own time, and the greatest of all the prophets, aided in building the tombs of past prophets, and helped to garnish the sepulchres of the righteous men of other days. How often, Reader, in various forms and varying degrees has this same lamentable spectacle been exhibited the world over. How often have men who commemorated the names and memories of bygone reformers and helped to build their monuments persecuted the reformers of their own day! How often have men who were foremost in lauding benefactors of past times, neglected or openly attacked the benefactors—ofttimes greater—of their own!

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

It is sad to have to admit that even in our own day, in a somewhat modified sense, the charge here laid against these Pharisees is not altogether inapplicable to ourselves. We do not, it is true, now kill our benefactors; but we have often done, and do still, what to the fine natures of such men is perhaps not much better; we ridicule them, misrepresent them, and asperse them. In some cases—for things march fast in these latter ages—if the lives of such men are prolonged, they outlive their reviling, and in old age receive our homage and affection. But even in modern times many of our best and noblest men have died in neglect and derision; and it has been left to the next generation or to another still to meet and unveil their statues and own them as true friends of the human race.

Even in ordinary life garnishing sepulchres is still a very favourite form of hypocrisy. The various, and in many cases strange, forms in which what is called respect is shown to the dead—from crape and wreaths up to costly tombs and their epitaphs—are upon the whole unquestionably the very worst exhibitions of insincerity left amongst us. There are, we should think, few admirers of Jesus' own prescription to let the dead bury the dead. But, on the other hand, the symbols and trappings used to display our bereavement to spectators are fast becoming hateful to thoughtful men. The connection between sorrow for the loss and tender reverence for the memories of those we loved, and the various paraphernalia still used to display those feelings is not discernible. The connection between such paraphernalia and certain vested interests is however evident enough; and the power of these latter to raise adverse clamour, as in many like cases, against those who seek to emancipate us from such exactions is very evident also.

It is very probable that most modern readers of this Gospel narrative, and of innumerable other records of the killing of prophets and martyrdoms of righteous men with which history abounds, often complacently think, as these Scribes and Pharisees did, that had they lived in the days of their fathers they would not have taken part in proceedings so lamentable.

30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

And it is no doubt true that had you, Reader, and had we lived in the times of our fathers, in the possession of our own modern

ideas, we should not have taken part in, but have resisted the killing of the martyrs. But had we lived in those days with the ideas of those days possessing us there can, we fear, be little or no doubt that we also should have been partakers of martyrs' blood.

It is easy for us, accustomed to see conflicting religious beliefs, in the very mild forms in which such beliefs now exist, living side by side in peace; who know that religious truths do not belong to the demonstrable order of truths; that religious disputes are interminable either by reason or by martyrdom; and who have learnt that there is no practical reason whatever why men in religious matters, as in others, should not agree to differ; it is easy for us to wonder why our fathers did not see these things as we see them, and why they persecuted each other.

But if we had been possessed with the terrible and remorseless logic which possessed and absorbed the minds of our forefathers—There is but one true faith; it is ours; false faiths have no right to exist—depend upon it we should have deduced from such premises a Therefore as terrible and as sorrowful as that our fathers deduced.

Jesus here gives to his denunciation of these Scribes and

Pharisees a very singular turn, which scarcely

31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

seems a fair one. Descendants of those who in past times martyred good men ought to,

and do, deplore the mistaken crimes their ancestors committed; but the attempt to fasten upon such descendants, even if lineal ones, in any way the blame or odium of their forefathers' deeds is an attempt with which we can have no sympathy. Three centuries ago our own country was plentifully stained with the blood of Christian martyrs shed by Christians. Probably every man now living in these isles—with possibly a few abnormal exceptions—regrets and deplores those melancholy events. But to censure this generation for those deeds—to censure even the lineal descendants of the men most concerned in them—is a proceeding which would now be justly scouted as wanting in good sense and reasonableness.

How this exhortation of Jesus to persevere in the line of killing

32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

prophets feels to other readers we do not know. It grates upon us. It is quite true

Christian commentators assure us that it is a rhetorical expression merely, and must not be taken as a serious injunction. But whether

a rhetorical expression or not, it is a very unpleasant one. And it is deeply regrettable to think that it was about to be acted upon in a very literal way by the addition of the greatest of prophets to the list of slain seers.

“The measure of your fathers.” In reading the history of the Jews one often wonders that Jehovah continued his strange partiality for that wayward people so long as he did. The continued ill-requiting of the divine favouritism by “my people Israel” would, one would have thought, have long ago led our Creator to at least try some other and better type of our race with his special regard.

No doubt the special celestial liking for the Jews was at this time on the point of at last coming to an end; and it is painful to think, judging from its history since, that heaven’s special regard for the Hebrew race seems to have been followed by heaven’s special aversion. A spoilt nation seems to be like a spoilt child. The system is bad in both cases.

As we think of Jewish history generally, as here raised by the words “your fathers,” we are reminded of a very curious and very awkward circumstance. A strange difference of opinion concerning the four centuries of Jewish history immediately preceding the time of Jesus exists between the two great sections of Christendom. By one section the history of the Jews during those four centuries is regarded as sacred, like the rest of Jewish history; and the books recording it are received as part of the sacred volume. By the other section of Christendom that portion of the history of God’s people, though the portion nearest to Jesus, is, from some cause not easy to discover, indeed quite undiscoverable, regarded as secular history merely, and the books recording it left out of Scripture as not inspired.

This singular disagreement greatly confirms the view we have so often expressed, that holy writ is so like man’s own that to determine which is which is a very formidable problem. The books and the history thus so diversely regarded by Christians themselves seem to outsiders very much of a kind with the books and the history of the periods preceding them. There is the same mixture of edifying and unedifying matter; the same recording of things worth recording and of things not. The only very noticeable difference between Jewish records during the four centuries preceding Jesus’ visit to us and the record of the ages anterior is that

in the former there is less of the fabulous element. But the steady decline of that element in the historical books of the generally received "Old Testament" is one of the most conspicuous of its features.

Perhaps no spectacle the world has ever presented is more truly singular than that of a number of men determining from a mass of claimants which is holy writ and which is not. In the case of the New Testament now before us the sifting of true Scripture from voluminous false was a formidable task, and who can feel sure that no alloy is still left? What, for example, is there in the two last books of the collection—Jude and Revelation—whereby men could be assured they were of heaven and not of men? That in cases of doubt it was safer to give the benefit thereof to the charitable view may perhaps be granted; though whether the rejecting of a genuine or the accepting of a non-genuine work is the lesser of two evils is itself a very trying problem. The attacks of modern scholarship upon some of the works forming our New Testament group are alarming enough; but not more so than the admissions that may be seen in the works of the early Christian historians of the doubts and suspicions which hung over them then.

The strange problem of determining Holy Scripture once thrown on men will never, we may feel assured, be thrown upon men again. Seventeen centuries of intermittent activity of heaven's pen have been followed by seventeen centuries of unbroken stillness. Nor is there anything leading us to hope, to fear, or to expect that the divine pen will ever be resumed. We must be content to regard the weird book which closes—though its chronological title to do so is very uncertain—the sacred collection, as the *Finis*—to our thinking the desirable *Finis*—of celestial literature.

Taking the phrase "your fathers"—as we are bound to do—as from Abraham to the time of these Pharisees unbroken and inclusive, it must be acknowledged that amongst the Jews a "perverse generation" was the rule and not the exception. Between one generation of the children of Israel and another there was not much to choose. One generation never seemed to rise above its predecessor in the way so remarkable in the Western races of mankind. The likeness of one generation to another characterized the Jews as it has done all other Asiatics.

Reaching a high pitch of vehemence, Jesus, in this charming

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

verse, sums up his long impeachment. This long outpour of vituperation is brought to a climax in a verse eminently worthy of doing so.

Anger and vexation on the part of an Omnipotent and Omniscient being are, to us, Reader, not comprehensible. The permission of an Omnipotent being for unpleasant and undesirable things to take place, and which without such permission could never have occurred, seems to effectually exclude the notion of anger thereat and thereafter on his part. That the leaders of Israel should be a generation of vipers, and Moses' seat be filled by serpents on their way to the damnation of hell, is dreadful enough; but we are unable to see in lamentation any satisfactory or intelligible substitute for prevention. The sufferance accorded to such dreadful human beings as those here depicted by Jesus, like the creation and existence of the real vipers and serpents to which they are likened, is entirely unintelligible.

It is common in Christian literature to see wonder expressed that men could ever be so callous and so blind, and so truly wicked as to hate, oppose, and put to death Jesus of Nazareth; the meek and lowly one; one who returned good for evil; one who blessed his enemies; one who "when he was reviled, reviled not again." Such wonder can only be arrived at, as so many other feelings concerning the Prophet of Nazareth are arrived at, by dwelling solely upon certain aspects of his life and teachings, and persistently keeping out of sight, out of mind, and out of heart, other aspects which, however, even these *ex parte* Gospels make as clear as day.

In sober truth, as shown in these Gospels even, Jesus was sometimes meek and lowly, but sometimes very much otherwise; he once exhorted men to bless their enemies, but certainly did not bless his own; he enjoined men to "do good to them that hate you"; but the kind of good he will himself do to those who hated him we here see. In short, the Prophet of Nazareth was a vigorous, but not a courteous or a fair opponent; and when he was reviled, replied in precisely the same style and terms as those used to himself—with cruel threats superadded.

We regret that Jesus was put to death as much as any Christian can; if, indeed, bearing in mind their usual theory, Christians may be considered as truly regretting that event at all. But apart

altogether from the overriding theory that Jesus intended to be put to death, and that the event was consequently bound to come to pass, it is really much less astonishing that Jesus was put to death by his religious opponents, than in the cases of many others upon whom a similar fate was inflicted on similar grounds. For not only were the innovations upon the existing faith which were taught by Jesus of the most fundamental kind, they were also in many respects of a very painful character to strict and pious Judaism; and never were religious opponents spoken of in more harsh and unrestrained terms than those used by Jesus.

The word "Christlike" is a very popular adjective with pietists. Its usual purport is to indicate a kind of sublime meekness, a saintly submissiveness, an un murmuring endurance, and a giving of a kiss in return for a blow. When so used the word Christlike is, speaking generally, exceedingly un-Jesus-of-Nazareth-like. Jesus was a hard hitter; a severe critic, and not a very charitable one; a fierce resenter; a keen retaliator; and has in store for enemies a treatment that may be Christlike, but which is certainly not humane. The plain truth, Reader, is that the ideal Christ usually current in the minds of Christians and set forth by modern Christianity, bears about the same resemblance to the Jesus even of these Gospels, as the ideal God of these days bears to the Jehovah depicted in the Jewish Scriptures.

We have often wondered, Reader, as we have pondered upon this Gospel narrative, whether if Jesus had been kind to these Scribes and Pharisees and other enemies, if he had exhibited towards them the so-called Christian virtues, if he had addressed them lovingly, or even pleasantly, he would not have softened them, presuming that to have been his wish and consistent with his main purpose in visiting our globe. But Jesus does not seem to us to have ever shown these men one single bit of gentleness, tenderness, or loving-kindness. We have not come across the smallest evidence that he yearned to illumine these men and bring them to better things. Asperity began and asperity ended all his dealings with them.

The connection of this with the preceding verse is not very clear,

the "wherefore" with which it begins being a difficulty rather than a help. It is difficult to think of prophets, wise men, and scribes being sent for the purposes here named.

"Prophets, wise men, and scribes." This

34 ¶ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and

persecute *them* from phrase opens a wide field for speculation. Are
city to city: the three classes here mentioned markedly
different and distinct? And may we presume that they are here
given in order of merit and importance?

Of prophets we have already expressed our estimate, and need say nothing more here. It is indeed a pleasure and a very agreeable surprise to meet with mention, and very favourable mention, of wise men. For the wise men here so called, and justly so called, are not the kind of "wise men" into which our translators so ingeniously transformed the Magi who figured so deplorably at the outset of our narrative, but another sort altogether. This pleasant reference to wise men by Jesus is not only agreeable in itself, but to us, Reader, it is doubly so, because we have far greater faith in wise men and in the beneficial results of their work than in prophets and in scribes. There is something loveable in the idea that heaven sends wise men from time to time on the earth; for everything good and worthy amongst mankind has come from, or at least through, the one source of wise men, of noble and sagacious human beings.

The fate that befell these messengers of Jesus was a very sad one; some were killed and crucified; some were scourged; and some persecuted from city to city. Our knowledge of the period in question is too scanty to enable us to identify these missionaries of heaven.

The wise men and prophets Jesus sent on earth he did not, as we see, put in Moses' seat; on the other hand, they were persecuted, scourged, and killed by the officials who occupied that seat. The picture of heaven's method of operating and intermeddling in human affairs thus laid before us becomes, when we think of it, simply astounding.

The occupants of Moses' seat were the declared and recognized official representatives of heaven on our earth, and as such were, as we have just seen, to be strictly obeyed. On the other hand, these wise men and prophets were special messengers from heaven, and heaven's official representatives killed them!

Such a picture we leave to those who may be willing to dwell upon it, with the single remark that if it were heaven's design to bewilder men instead of to enlighten them, it is not easy to see how more certain and effectual steps to that end could have been chosen. It may here be observed how rarely any of the pre-eminently wise

men who have honoured and ennobled our world have been found in any of the world's chief seats. In the case of thrones, vacancies are of course filled up by Nature, and some very sorry specimens of her handiwork has she often displayed therein. But even in those other chief seats which men—either with supposed heavenly guidance or without—have had the filling of, how seldom have the chief men been found !

No doubt, regarded in its purely natural aspect, many and varied reasons for the humbling fact in question may be assigned ; some of which may justly be held to assuage our shame. Great and wise and far-seeing men are inevitably in advance of other men of their day, and by men less advanced the reality and validity of the wisdom proclaimed by true pioneers may not unnaturally, nor altogether unreasonably, be doubted. Then again striking merit and qualities often arouse striking antipathy, some of which antipathy is often honest and legitimate ; hence inoffensive mediocrity has often been the express ground of choice in the filling of chief seats. In some cases, too, great and wise men have refused to occupy chief seats either from a sincere personal aversion to filling them, or from refusal to wend the devious ways usually hitherto necessary to that end. Our own impression is that in these latter ages chief seats of all kinds are more worthily filled upon the whole than in times past. The meek are beginning to inherit the earth. At the same time it seems to us that many of the very best men will for many reasons never become placemen ; and more especially so in the case of those who are greatly in advance of their day and generation.

The ratiocination here ascribed to Jesus is certainly of a most extraordinary character. “Wherefore I send unto you prophets, wise men and scribes ; . . . that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth,” &c. There are in this Gospel many singular therefores and wherefores, but we are inclined to think this about the most curious of all.

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

The Jews believed, or at any rate taught, that of the first pair of human brothers, the one murdered the other ; that the firstborn and begotten of our species was an assassin. This was certainly a grim beginning of our race and of human brotherhood ; but whatever we may think of that particular and most melancholy

allegation, there is no doubt that much righteous blood has been shed upon our earth in every age.

“All the righteous blood shed upon the earth.” It seems scarcely likely that we ought to take this in its literal meaning. Much righteous blood has been spilt all over the world; but it almost seems impossible to think that the misdeeds of Egypt, China, and Mexico were also to be visited upon these wretched creatures; though it must be owned the act would be perfectly in keeping with the principle here laid down. Jesus was so intensely Jewish, so disdainful of everything non-Jewish, that we may pretty confidently assume that “upon the earth” was here meant to be applied to Jewish or scriptural occurrences only. Possibly also Gentile blood might not be considered as righteous blood; though far nobler blood than had ever stained Judea had been shed in Italy and in Greece.

Be this as it may, Jewish history was quite full enough of black and cruel deeds to satisfy the purpose here dealt with, without having resort to the world’s misdeeds generally.

Jesus goes on to assert that all the righteous blood ever shed upon the earth, from the purely personal crime perpetrated by the firstborn of the human race, down through the ages to the slaughter of the son of Barachias—whatever that crime may have been—shall be visited upon these Scribes and Pharisees, or upon “this generation”; for the narrative characteristically leaves readers at liberty to understand either the one or the other.

“Son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” As is well known, this allusion is a most perplexing and distressing one; for nothing corresponding to it is to be found in the Old Testament. This indeed is no new difficulty; for the early part of this Gospel furnishes us with many like perplexities. The “quotations” from and allusions to the Jewish Scriptures found in this record are of a kind to justly and severely shake our confidence in its fidelity in other things.

But though this “son of Barachias” incident is not recognizable in Jewish Scripture, it only too faithfully corresponds with an event that occurred after the time of Jesus; and some spirited apologists have solved the dilemma by suggesting that Jesus spoke prophetically!

To go into this matter would be outside the province of this work. But we can say, Reader, in no ironical spirit, but most sincerely,

that we have often felt much sympathy with the excellent men who have toiled so hard at the task of reconciling and harmonizing these Gospels internally and externally. Often, however, have we felt that if they had only laboured as hard to show some portions of these Gospels—the intensely odious paragraph now before us amongst the rest—to be not genuine, instead of genuine, what greatly better service they would have rendered to their faith.

Jesus, we may remember, had in olden times declared himself to be a jealous God, who visited the sins of the fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation. In anything but “holy writ,” the deliberate punishing of children and grandchildren for their fathers’ and grandfathers’ offences would certainly shock us very much; but familiarity with the contents of the various holy writs in the world renders men callous to their many enormities.

In those olden times punishment of the third and fourth generation from the offender seems to have exhausted and assuaged the divine wrath. Not so here. The entire list of sins from the murder of Abel down to that of the son of Barachias were to be all clubbed together and visited upon this one generation. Whether this will have the effect of remitting their punishment in the case of the real offenders in the preceding generations does not appear. If not, it is clear that the same offence will be punished twice over; for punishing a child for a parent’s offence, unless the parent be let off, palpably means punishing two persons for one person’s offence.

The visitation of the accumulated sins of a nation upon one generation is a picture we leave to those who may be disposed to do so to think out and dwell upon. We have become so habituated to the flagrancies of all religions, this Christian included, that their power to stir our indignation or resentment is completely worn out, Reader.

We may, however, just observe that as a sort of mild extenuation of the flagitious enormity here before us, it is sometimes pleaded that the same principle is at work in Nature. We have already remarked that we entirely decline to accept Nature and natural operations as in any sense whatever a moral standard. And to us any analogy or fancied analogy between Nature and any given religious system is entirely thrown away for the purpose of recon-

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

ciling us to the iniquities of the one or the other. By the iniquities of Nature we, of course, simply mean, not any iniquity in purpose or intention, but the iniquities proceeding from the entire absence of moral purpose or discrimination which characterizes natural operations of all kinds.

The alleged visitation of the sins of fathers upon children in Nature is, when examined, found to be a very partial truth only; and such as it is, is only a part of a wider principle. Parental sins are in Nature visited upon children only in the same sense in which misfortunes, mistakes, and neutral acts of all kinds are "visited" upon them also.

Evolution indeed shows us how the acts—whether sinful or sinless, voluntary or involuntary, does not in the least signify—of our remote progenitors vast ages ago influence us even yet; and how our acts will also influence a dim posterity. The reverse process is also in a measure true. The sins and misfortunes of children are visited upon the fathers. Parental misery for the ill-doing and the calamities of children is one of the heaviest items in human sorrow. From the nature of the case this process cannot be carried far back; unless we suppose that what goes on on earth is conveyed to the other two worlds. How, too, a man's actions are "visited" upon his wife, collaterals, and connections is also evident; and how even the acts of strangers may "visit" us is only too well known.

An examination of the erratic way in which the sins of a father affect his children, reveals at once how entirely void of proportion or moral purpose the process is. The minor sins or the transient mistake of a parent may fall with heavy weight upon his child; and grave misdeeds may fall very lightly. The history of aristocracies shows us how the profitable misdeeds of an ancestor may be very agreeably visited upon his posterity. So, too, the careful lifelong dissoluteness of one father is often less disastrous to his child than the transient isolated backsliding of another father to his. Some relatively venial sins are virulently hereditary; some far graver ones are not so at all. And as a general rule, the misfortunes of a man more certainly fall upon his children than do his sins.

To institute a comparison between the supposed deliberate punishment of a child for its father's offence by a conscious Being, and the punishment which may or may not fall upon his offspring by reason of a parent's wrongdoing in pursuance of uniform laws

of Nature in which moral discrimination is entirely absent, is an idle thing whether the comparison is drawn for the purpose of justification, extenuation, or anything else.

The idea of the transferability of sin from a father to a child, or from any one person to another, and the companion notions of vicarious atonement and scapegoats, are now very imperfectly comprehensible to us. And for the same reason that so many other obsolete and extinct modes of thought are also difficult to understand; we can no longer re-enter the premises from which men deduced such conclusions.

Christian commentators usually profess that the atrocious threat named in this verse was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. If they consider that event a suitable and adequate fulfilment of what Jesus here declares, well and good. But we are unable to see any tolerable way in which the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus is at all available for the purpose. The adult generation Jesus was here addressing would have all but passed away by the time Jerusalem was taken and sacked; some few old men and old women of "this generation" would alone remain. The real generation who suffered the calamities, real—and as often set before us—imaginary, of the siege of Jerusalem, were the boys and girls who had a few days previous to this hosannah Jesus into Jerusalem.

If we regard this and the following verses—which are found in quite another connection in the third Gospel—as being a continuation of the foregoing address, it must be owned that we have here a very sudden, but a very welcome, change in the matter and the manner of that address. We are glad indeed to get to the end of the long torrent of invective we have recently had to dwell upon.

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." The special, extraordinary, and long-continued solicitude for the inhabitants of a particular and very second-rate city of our planet on the part of the Maker of the Milky Way is not easy to comprehend. Whether Rome, Athens, Carthage, Delhi, or the far off cities of China, Mexico, and Peru also called forth this amiable solicitude we do not know. But we greatly fear it was confined to Jerusalem alone.

Jerusalem was certainly the only one of such cities which was

favoured with heavenly warnings and heavenly manifestations. It was also the only one to which prophets were sent. In this, however, we think other cities were fortunate; the absence of prophets being, in our estimation, not only no deprivation but a very real gain.

Christian commentators as a rule find great beauty and pathos in the famous simile here used by Jesus. We are not at all sure these same commentators would have regarded the picture of our Creator as a hen gathering those wayward chickens, the Jews, under his or her wings as either a particularly appropriate or pathetic one had they met with it in anything else than holy writ. We have a strong suspicion that if found elsewhere, this simile would have been handled very severely by those who here declare their admiration of it. The narrow dividing line between the sublime and the ridiculous is admitted; and we have no option, Reader, but to state that to us the simile now before us hangs over heavily on the side not sublime.

Not only in the Jewish and the Christian, but in other scriptures also, things are habitually lauded by believers that in other writings would be treated unmercifully. In this, theologians are not altogether singular; for literary commentators often applaud passages in great authors that they would treat, and justly treat, with scant respect if found in ordinary writers and contemporaries.

"Ye would not." This seems a singular finish to a passage which begins by apostrophizing Jerusalem. And how little in harmony this seems with what we read at the outset of this Gospel that Jerusalem and all Judea were baptized by John confessing their sins!

With a sudden and characteristic change of metaphor, Jesus declares to his hearers, "your house is left unto you desolate."

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

Some expositors say the house here spoken of is the temple; some think it means Jerusalem; and some think it means the Jewish dispensation. Unless something further on the point was added by Jesus, not here recorded, it is to be feared these hearers must have felt a like uncertainty as to what was meant by their house being left desolate.

A still more serious uncertainty surrounds the meaning and proper application of this verse. "Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say," is full

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me

henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

of difficulties however expounded. The most usual explanation of this verse is that Jesus here speaks of his second advent to our planet; a theory for which the verse itself is a very slender foundation. The long and very diverse paraphrases of this verse offered to us by theologians and commentators as explanations are—and the remark is equally true of their explications of some other passages—often most presumptuous. Read one after another, conflicting dogmatisms of such a nature are most unpleasant.

It is no small relief, Reader, to have reached the end of this unpleasant chapter. Ostensibly this chapter is one continuous address spoken by Jesus to the multitude, including his disciples. Weighty reasons exist for doubting this view of it, into which it is not necessary here to enter.

In the main this chapter is a long and bitter impeachment and denunciation of the Scribes and the Pharisees by Jesus, and the declaration of his intention to bring upon those bodies the most fearful and exorbitantly vindictive retribution. It would have done something to reconcile us to all this if we could have felt these Scribes and Pharisees to have been worthy on the score of importance of so much divine indignation. The affairs of our tiny planet must seem an entomological study to the Creator of the Universe at best. But our sense of proportion seems still more grated upon by the divine absorption in the relatively trivial affairs of Judea alone. We fail to see in what single sense these Scribes and Pharisees offered a suitable subject-matter for the painful attention bestowed upon them. Painful attention we have called it; for how easily the divine grace that turned one of the most virulent of these Pharisees into a potent though not very amiable champion of the new faith, could have wrought the same good work on others also is evident; how, indeed, the conversion of the whole world in a day by like means is possible is equally evident. But then are not the ways of heaven inscrutable?

There are admirers of the Prophet of Nazareth who profess to admire even the acrimonious attack on his opponents made by Jesus in this chapter. According to them it is a masterpiece of invective and denunciation. This is an aspect of the subject of very subordinate importance, but we are unable to concur in such an estimate of this long accusation even in that very minor point. Considered as a continuous address, it may be admitted to be strong,

animated, and in its way vigorous. But it is neither eloquent nor impressive. It is too high pitched; there is too much of the scold about it. And its effect on a reader is not in the smallest degree that burning indignation against these Scribes and Pharisees that we should feel in the case of men against whom such dreadful accusations had been effectively brought home. On the contrary, an unmistakeable counter-feeling is aroused to the effect that an impeachment of such a kind must be extremely one-sided and overdrawn. Descriptions of each other by rival religionists are never trustworthy. Even apart from the palpably overcharged outline of real faults, the entire suppression of good qualities in such descriptions makes a picture of bodies of men manifestly untrue to human nature. Portions of this chapter found in the other Gospels as isolated and incidental sayings of Jesus are, so regarded, natural and intelligible; and there can be little real doubt that the galaxy of invectives here set before us as a set address may be ascribed to a very transparent tendency of our author's.

The entire omission of the Sadducees from this and other denunciations of Jesus is very noteworthy and very conspicuous. It has been often and much commented on, and many explanations of it have been given. The sceptical teachings of the Sadducees struck at the root of Jesus' own chief doctrines much more decisively and fundamentally than did the teachings of the Pharisees. The theories of the Sadducees were fatal to the main outlines of Jesus' system; whereas the doctrines of the Pharisees were in close affinity with his own on such prime subjects as the nature of God and the existence of a life after death. And yet, whilst Jesus' aversion to and condemnation of the Pharisees were severe and persistent, there was clearly little, if any, antipathy on his part towards the Sadducees.

The allegations sometimes made that Jesus regarded the Sadducees with contempt, and that their supposed fewness rendered them undeserving of much reference, are manifestly unfounded. The Sadducees are mentioned again and again in these Gospels; and when a deputation of Sadducees alone waited on Jesus, they were treated with a courtesy and an absence of censure most marked and most unusual. And after they had gone away, we hear of no bitter references to them, so customary regarding the Pharisees after Pharisees' interviews.

No doubt it cannot now be determined with certainty what may

have been Jesus' exact reasons for the significant difference of behaviour he displayed to the Pharisees and to the Sadducees. We have a decided conviction of our own on the subject, and others may adopt whatever view seems most to commend itself. A few remarks on the general question raised by this important Gospel fact may here be permitted.

Quarrels about religion and the supernatural are only maintainable for any length of time and with energy in cases where the beliefs therein held on both sides have a good deal in common. Quarrels between believers and general non-believers may possibly be severe, but it is not necessary even to have them at all. In such cases a truce is easy, and contentions may remain in abeyance altogether. But antagonistic creeds and supernaturalisms are of necessity in interminable rivalry and enmity.

Between men, for example, who believe in a heaven and a hell, and men who believe in neither, there need not necessarily be conflict at all; each may go their way in peace. But between two sets of men, both of whom believe in a heaven and a hell, but who hold different and mutually exclusive methods of reaching the one and escaping the other, conflict is, and must remain, acute and absorbing, if the beliefs in question possess any life and vigour.

Hence it is that a negative attitude in religion divides men least. Those who possess a religious belief of any kind may, if they think fit, look upon those who possess none as benighted beings. But there the matter ends. Whatever non-believers may be, they are at any rate not propagators of any rival creed. Non-belief is entirely free from the inevitable and acute points of friction presented to each other by opposing positive beliefs.

And that a negative attitude in religion is not nearly so irritating as a rival positive attitude is the reason why, though religionists of all the heterogeneous kinds may deem it proper and convenient to have a tilt at pure non-belief from time to time, there is not in such a tilt anything approaching the zest and the animus shown when rival religionists go at each other. To which it may be added that an attack upon a negative like general non-belief by a motley array of rival beliefs, has in it, and must be felt to have in it, something excessively ludicrous.

It may be said that minds free from religious belief are worse ground for, and less hopeful to, the inroad of any given creed than

minds already in possession of some other creed which it may be possible to displace. It may also be said that in the long run non-belief will be more fatal to religion than any quantity of mutual and internecine strifes between antagonistic beliefs themselves. Very possible. But it is none the less true that at all times—as was here shown eighteen centuries ago—mere non-belief is far less practically offensive than a rival faith which proclaims itself to be the true one and one's own faith to be a false one. Between general proclaimers that all creeds are false and proclaimers that our own faith is false but theirs is true, there is a fundamental difference.

And whatever may be thought of non-belief in other aspects, it must be owned to be greatly conducive to charity; the greatest of all the sources of human discord being absent in non-believers. Any religious belief held with an intensity and to a degree entitling it to be called a real faith is essentially destructive of kindly feeling towards holders of other faiths; whilst freedom from a religious faith altogether leaves the exercise of human fellow feeling entirely unfettered.

How Jesus intends to treat, or is already treating, these Scribes and Pharisees we have just seen. How he will treat the Sadducees there is nothing to show us. But when the latter, to their great astonishment, find themselves rising from the dead, they will, we think, have great reason to be thankful they were Sadducees rather than Pharisees during their brief span of earthly life.

And as a general proposition, Reader, it seems better to present ourselves at the melancholy judgment day of our species entirely creedless rather than as the holder of a false creed—the sorrowful position of the great bulk of our fellow mortals, or, alas! our fellow immortals.

MATTHEW XXIV.

WE now come to a chapter which, in our judgment, throws more light upon the Prophet of Nazareth than any other portion of the Gospel narrative. It contains utterances of his which are of vital importance and of decisive character in the attempt to ascertain who and what Jesus really was. Whether Jesus was a supernatural per-

CHAPTER XXIV.

1 *Christ foretelleth the destruction of the temple: 8 what and how great calamities shall be before it: 29 the signs of his coming to judgment. 36 And because that day and hour is un-*

known, ⁴² we ought to watch like good servants, expecting every moment our master's coming.

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

sonage or but a member of the human race only is a question which this chapter contains an answer to, and a question which in our judgment it answers in an unmistakeable way.

It is difficult to gather what is meant by the disciples showing Jesus the buildings of the temple. We do not mean in the transcendental sense of its being impossible to show Jesus anything he did not already know; we mean in the purely natural sense that it is not clear how the disciples, being Galileans also, could know or be acquainted with the Jerusalem temple better than Jesus was himself. Probably the laboured phrase, "came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple," means nothing more than somethingsaid by the disciples which had the effect of directing the special attention of Jesus to the building itself. Indeed, in the next Gospel this statement is given in the form of a casual remark of one of the disciples, and Jesus' answer as directed to him personally.

Whatever may have been the meaning of the disciples showing Jesus the temple buildings, Jesus in response thereto assured the disciples that the buildings they were then looking upon were about to be demolished; a correct statement or prediction fulfilled some forty-one years afterwards when Titus besieged, sacked, and almost destroyed the city of Jerusalem, temple included.

Our author did not write this Gospel—even according to orthodox authorities—until many years after the death of Jesus; many assigning its composition to a date very near to the destruction of the temple here referred to. It need hardly be said that other authorities hold this Gospel to have been written subsequent to the siege of Jerusalem in which the razing of the temple here predicted took place. The plain truth on the matter is that nothing is really known even approximately as to the true date, nor yet the real authorship of this or the other Gospel records.

For ourselves, Reader, we do not find the slightest difficulty in believing that Jesus made the statement or prophecy here attributed to him; a statement to our thinking both quite natural and probable. The Jerusalem temple was then an obviously threatened, if not a certainly doomed, structure. Its jeopardy must have forced itself upon every reflecting Jew, and needed no prophetic insight

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

to perceive. Judea was conquered and possessed by the Romans, who—in spite of their honourably elastic practice regarding the religions of the countries they subjugated—particularly disliked and despised Judaism, and extended a very precarious toleration to it. And when we think of the many tumults and revolts against Roman authority raised in Judea, our wonder is that the Jewish temple escaped so long as it did.

It is the usual practice of Christian commentators to bestow upon this temple a good deal of sentiment. A building less worthy of it, either on the score of its antiquity, its history, or indeed anything else, could not easily be named. The original temple was destroyed some six centuries before the time of Jesus; and the building here in question was a replacement, and a secondary erection in every sense of the word. During its four and a half centuries of existence its history was anything but an elevating one. Again and again it was profaned and plundered—made a real “den of thieves”—both by Jews and Gentiles; and in the time of Herod it had reached a state of great dilapidation. Whatever splendour it possessed in the time of Jesus was due to Herod; for that worthy practically rebuilt it. An edifice less fitted to evoke tender memories than the second Jerusalem temple we do not know.

This temple, like its better predecessor, was destined to be demolished; from which we see that the sanctuaries of Jehovah are not exempt from the fate which impartially overtakes the holy buildings of all the other deities also; a fact of which we are still pathetically reminded by the burning down of some beautiful Christian church, with, in some cases, what is far more sorrowful, the burning of its inmates also. The fact that the site of this Jerusalem temple has since been covered by a Moslem temple erected to the glory of Allah, seems to show that Jehovah is now a very good-humoured deity, entirely free from prejudice in favour of so-called sacred ground. And the non-success which attended the great and prolonged efforts of Christendom to wrest the holy city and ground from contamination, proves to us that it was an object with which Jehovah had no active sympathy.

With very natural curiosity the disciples came to Jesus to

3 ¶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us,

privately ask him when the event he had just mentioned would take place. According to the next Gospel the disciples who did this

when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

were four in number; the two pairs of brothers, James and John, Peter and Andrew.

It would thus seem that our author was not present when the discourse he narrates in this chapter was delivered. It is found narrated in the next two Gospels in a substantially similar manner; but it is, very characteristically, entirely omitted by the one disciple-historian who did hear it.

Along with their inquiry when the demolition of the temple was to take place, the disciples also asked Jesus two other questions; namely, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of world?" A local event possessing little more than local interest is thus mixed up with two immense events of universal import. And to this unfortunate intermixture the difficulties of this "difficult chapter" are ascribed by Christian commentators and apologists.

In the long reply given by Jesus to the three questions thus submitted to him, we find the respective subjects, instead of being kept clear and distinct, confused and intermixed in a way that does either Jesus himself or his reporters but little credit. To unravel the tangled discourse we find in this chapter, and to defend Jesus from the palpable meanings of large portions of it, have been the melancholy task of Christian apologists in all ages, except the first, when the latter part of it was not yet needed. To that end ingenuities and subtleties of all descriptions have been propounded; and, alas! sophistries of all kinds tendered, many of which no amount of charity will enable us to think ever passed muster with those who offered them. Whether from a feeling that the topics have been exhausted, or from other causes, the difficulties of this chapter, like the unpleasant difficulties of other chapters, are in our time usually left severely alone. The predictions of the Prophet of Nazareth found in this chapter are now treated as his devil-castings, his interview with the great chief of devils in the wilderness, on the temple pinnacle, and on the high mountain, his two genealogies, and the quenchless furnace of fire awaiting all but the elect, are also now treated; that is to say, they are quietly glided over, or if alluded to at all, are spoken of in circumlocutory terms expressly chosen to evade real contact.

Jesus' reply to the grave questions here submitted to him

4 And Jesus answered extends throughout the remainder of this and

and said unto them,
Take heed that no man
deceive you.

5 For many shall
come in my name, say-
ing, I am Christ; and
shall deceive many.

the whole of the next chapter; and contains declarations that to us are perfectly decisive of the question, Who and what was Jesus of Nazareth?

In the first place, Jesus warns the disciples to take heed that "no man deceive you"; a very excellent, and, alas! very necessary exhortation in all human affairs, but pre-eminently so in religious matters. "For," continues Jesus, "many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ, and shall deceive many." It seems passing strange to think that Jesus should have considered a caution of a kind like this needed with his own disciples, his four chief disciples. The companions of the true Christ to be warned against being deceived by false Christs! There is something curiously infelicitous in such a warning as this. Could there possibly be such a degree of resemblance between a false Christ and the true one as to make the deception of these disciples a real possibility? Further on, Reader, we shall find ourselves startled by the candid admission of Jesus that these false Christs had indeed powers and gifts that rendered them practically indistinguishable from the true Christ; powers that make us cease to wonder they deceived many, and might endanger apostles even.

"And shall deceive many." What particular false claimants to Christship Jesus here refers to cannot now be ascertained; but how lamentably true this assertion is in a broader sense is only too well known. The vast bulk of mankind have ever been, and are still, the victims of religious deluders. Every part of the world has abounded with religious pretenders; and the really mournful part of that deplorable fact is the facility with which they "deceived many," and continue to do so.

The religious founders and claimants who have so unhappily succeeded in palming themselves upon our species have been of every kind and variety, from the very grossest and, one would have thought, the most palpable knaves, through various gradations up to highly refined enthusiasts, who have often commingled with their supernatural pretensions strivings for really good objects, efforts at beneficial innovations, and a philanthropy more or less pure and genuine.

In the time of Jesus mankind consisted mainly of the believers in two great prophets, whose adherents, along with the adherents of a third great prophet—whom Jesus mysteriously permitted

to arise six centuries after establishing his own system—still comprise between them three-fourths of the human race. No man denies that there are many good things in the teachings of the three religious founders who thus so largely religiously dominate the human family. Many good thinkers have held their huge systems to have, in many respects, wrought beneficial results; and extend to their authors the limited approbation, or at any rate extenuation, usually accorded to those ancient lawgivers, who with no selfish object also laid claim to supernatural communion and sanction because they saw such a claim needful to gain and to enforce acceptance of their ordinances.

None the less the three great creeds we have mentioned are religious impostures or impositions, and still divert, as they have for ages diverted, the main stream of humanity to a very calamitous destination.

Apart from these religious giants, the real ease with which even the worse kind of religious impostors have obtained followers is one of the saddest things to be met with in human records. And were it not that we remember that the ways of Jehovah are inscrutable and past finding out, we might well ask ourselves why Jesus should have ever permitted these false founders and false Christs to arise and thus fatally deceive men.

These two verses are examples of what may be termed very safe predictions; for the things here delineated have unhappily been the ordinary and regular occurrences of every age. Wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes in divers places are unfortunately such old-fashioned and familiar events in the history of our race and our globe that their cessation rather than their repetition would fitly

6 And ye shall hear of wars : see that ye be not troubled : for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

betoken the coming of some great change. Considered as heralds or portents, the things here enumerated seem a surprisingly obvious and commonplace list.

When too we read that wars and rumours of wars "must come to pass," we here take the liberty, or rather the duty, of entering our humble but energetic protest against the proposition. That human beings do go to war is bad enough; that they must, is an idea we decline to receive in any of its shapes. Few things are

more surprising than the way in which people who would scorn fatalism as applied to the present—their own—time, tolerate the notion as applied to times past.

If wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are the beginnings of sorrows, we must own that what follows

8 All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.

feels to us very much like an anti-climax. For with every respect for and sympathy with these disciples in the troubles that may have befallen them, wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes with their uncountable victims necessarily dwarf the misfortunes of a dozen apostles.

“And shall kill you.” The fulfilment of this verse is difficult to trace. Of the fate of the various disciples we only possess contradictory and untrustworthy traditions generally. Of the four particular disciples named in the next Gospel as being present at the delivery of this discourse—James,

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

John, Peter, and Andrew—we are told in the book of Acts that the first of these, James, was put to death by Herod. Tradition, much controverted, tells us that Peter after founding his famous chair at Rome was crucified there; and a like fate is similarly ascribed to his brother Andrew elsewhere. But John was not killed. He lived to be a centenarian; and happily so, or we should have been deprived of that remarkable book which brings the divine Scriptures to a final close.

“Ye shall be hated of all nations.” In what way this was personally applicable to the disciples is not discoverable. Even in the old world there were a good many nations that neither these disciples nor any other Jews had then, or afterwards, so much as heard of; nor does it appear that the known nations of the earth concerned themselves very much with, much less took the trouble to hate, these disciples. Christianity was a very modest affair, and the secular mentions of it slight and not flattering to its importance when the last survivor of these disciples passed away.

Much difference of opinion exists as to whom this passage ought to be applied. Many think that it depicts

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

the disastrous effect of adversity upon Christian believers; others think it refers to the Jews generally, in part fulfilment of the declaration that the accumulated misdeeds of their ancestors had to be wreaked “upon this generation.” The passage reminds one of the description

of the ravages of religious discord in a home given by Jesus when in Galilee.

Going back to the subject with which he began his discourse,

11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

Jesus avers that, as if to make confusion worse confounded, amidst all these miseries, "many false prophets shall rise," and, like the false

Christs, "shall deceive many." A not inappropriate finishing touch to the picture here set before us, though largely partaking of the ridiculous element.

The second of these verses is found, as indeed is the substance of several of the foregoing verses in the address given by Jesus when he sent these disciples on their mysterious mission to the cities of Israel.

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

We may remember that in the address to his disciples which we have just named, Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man come." Here the Gospel is to be

preached in "all the world" for a witness "unto all nations" before the end comes. The "end" here named is certainly a very ambiguous term. It may mean the end mentioned in the preceding verse; it may mean the end of the world; or it may mean the end represented by the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the termination of the Jewish dispensation. The latter is the exegesis usually adopted by Christian commentators, who thereupon try to show us that in some fashion the Gospel was preached in all the world and to all nations before the catastrophe referred to took place. As the knowledge of the world then possessed by the Jews was very limited and very hazy, and as there is no evidence to show or reason to believe that any of these disciples were ever a thousand miles from Jerusalem, the astonishing conclusion that the Gospel was preached in all the world and to all nations before Titus took Jerusalem is arrived at by dwindling the "world" to the small part of it within Jewish knowledge, and the "nations" to those the Jews had contact with.

If we take the "end" here referred to as some do, in the sense of the absolute end of the world, the condition precedent has in some sense now been accomplished. The Gospel has now been preached or, at least, nominally proclaimed over practically the entire surface

of our globe. It is certainly—to use a well-known Gospel metaphor—a very feeble plant in most places, and is decaying alarmingly in places where it once flourished vigorously; still it has in a tolerably literal sense been at length sown the world over.

It is usually understood that by the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place Jesus refers to the Roman army which, after the capture of Jerusalem, entered the temple and performed numerous acts of mockery and desecration therein. In the third Gospel, indeed, we find the specific statement, “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh,” ascribed to Jesus in the version of this discourse which is there given.

15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

The difficulty of this and the verses which immediately follow is to comprehend in what sense “ye shall see” could possibly apply to these disciples in reference to the matters named. This discourse was addressed to the disciples “privately”; indeed, to four of them only, according to the next Gospel. Any of these disciples who survived to the siege of Jerusalem would then be very old men; and of the four specifically named as listening to this address, three, James, Peter and Andrew, are understood to have met with their deaths previous to the events here spoken of as if they were themselves to witness and be concerned in.

It also appears that long before Jesus himself predicted the taking of Jerusalem, the prophet Daniel had done so. Speaking of the writings of that seer, “Whoso readeth, let him understand,” says Jesus. In anything else than Scripture, we should have taken this quaint allusion to have been meant for sarcasm. Taken seriously, it seems an expression of a forlorn hope that the reader may possibly understand what he finds written in the book of Daniel.

For piercing indeed must have been the intellect then required, and which is still required, to gather not simply the true meaning but any meaning whatever from the visions and dreams of Daniel. Some theologians, indeed, quite understand him; but they understand him as they do the book of Revelation, the present chapter, and so much other Scripture—in widely and alarmingly different senses. We greatly fear that whoever will undertake the heavy task of reading and studying the book of Daniel, either for the

purpose here enjoined of tracing therein the Roman army which destroyed the temple in the year 70, or for any other purpose, will be more likely to finish the task, as we did, with all respect for the seer entirely forfeited. For we are bound to say, Reader, that apart altogether from their incomprehensibility, anything commoner and more thoroughly vulgar than the dreams and the "visions of his head upon his bed" described to us by Daniel could not readily be met with. It may just be remarked that no book in the Scripture collection has fared worse at the hands of modern criticism and scholarship than the book of "Daniel."

Jesus here gives sundry admonitions how to escape the horrors of the capture of Jerusalem. They cannot be

16 Then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains:

17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house:

18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

termed very heroic or patriotic counsels. But to those who had decided upon flight in preference to remaining and taking part in the defence of their capital, they are very obvious prudences. The personal applicability of these precautions to the disciples we cannot perceive.

No doubt they might be imparted by them to others destined to be personally in need of them; still, forty years seems a long time to bear such cautions in mind.

Probably these verses ought to be regarded more as an abstract sketch and pourtrayal of the state of things prevailing at the time in question rather than as an actual and practical piece of advice how the occurrences might in some cases be avoided.

To us, Reader, this exclamation feels a piece of very cold comfort.

19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

Some modern commentators profess to see in it an outburst of yearning sympathy with helplessness. Power to help not exerted seems a curious kind of sympathy. We greatly fear

the sufferings of women who were with child and of those that gave suck in those days were amongst the things that "must come to pass."

In some of the older theologians there may be seen deliberate defences of the punishment of wives and of children for husbands' and fathers' offences, and certainly "Slay and spare not," even to the ripping up of women with child, was in olden times often enjoined by Jehovah. It may just be remarked, however, that Jesus has looked down from heaven upon many besieged cities besides Jerusalem; and has witnessed the sufferings of Christian

as well as non-Christian women and children with equal and rigid impartiality. Later on, this same Jerusalem was the scene of prolonged Christian and Moslem valour, fanaticism, and suffering.

“But pray ye.” For reasons we have already given, we do not see how this could be meant or intended for the disciples in their personal capacity. Most likely it is a general and abstract injunction which it may be hoped duly found its way to

20 And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day :

many whom it concerned, and who, it may also be hoped, adopted it with success. People, however, who have made up their minds to desert a threatened or besieged city cannot be, and ought not to be, nice choosers of times and seasons. They must get away as best they can; and those who would under such circumstances only travel a Sabbath day's journey on a Sabbath would not deserve a great deal of sympathy if overtaken. It is somewhat curious to note the number of cities that have been taken and great battles that have been fought on the “Sabbath” day; the Christian as well as the Jewish. This reference to “winter” is not easy to understand.

Jesus now asserts that the siege of Jerusalem was to be a “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” We are far from feeling as certain as commentators generally that Jesus was here referring to the siege of Jerusalem at all, and

21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

accept the allegation with much reservation. Not only is there here the entire absence of specification and of plain words characteristic of all prophecy; there is nothing that affords in what is here said more than a very weak and precarious presumption that the siege of Jerusalem by Titus was intended.

But even accepting the view that the great tribulation in question was the Roman attack upon and capture of Jerusalem, we are entirely unable to appreciate the assertion that that occurrence was the greatest tribulation of all time. If such a view be correct, even the famous flood with which Jesus once drowned all the human race save one household was a minor calamity.

The absurd relative importance ascribed by each nation to its own affairs is very manifest. And the gravity with which, for the purpose of giving colour to this statement, or supposed statement, of Jesus, Christian commentators lay before us extracts from the Jewish historian who narrates the siege of Jerusalem, and who

took part in its defence—including in some cases even the trumpety portents and marvels with which that historian so embellishes his narrative—is nothing short of diverting; especially when we remember how little to the minds of these commentators is that work, and especially its silences, in other respects. The statement that there will never again be anything so bad as the event in question is an eminently satisfactory one, which we may all be pleased to hear.

“No flesh be saved.” How entirely Jesus was confining himself to a Jewish view of these occurrences is very palpable. That no Jewish flesh would have survived an indefinite prolongation of these horrors might possibly be true. Happily the continuance of our race did not depend on the Jewish segment of it alone. Even if all “the children” had been exterminated, there were fortunately in existence elsewhere many other human stocks; amongst them some which—in spite of the very uncomplimentary epithet used by Jesus to distinguish Israelite and non-Israelite—were much better than the Jewish.

We rejoice, however, that the Hebrew race was not extirpated, and that we still have amongst us a sprinkling of the descendants of heaven’s once favourite people; though we are at a loss to perceive in any of these descendants known to us anything which throws any light upon our Creator’s extraordinary partiality for their ancestors.

“Those days shall be shortened.” It appears that, after all, these terrible events were somewhat abridged by heaven; they did not run their full course. “The elect’s sake” is the reason given for this kindly interposition. We could not quarrel with any reason for so happy a proceeding. And yet we own we should have been still better pleased to read that it was for the sake of them that were with child and them that gave suck, whom Jesus had named a little while back. Whether it be a pious or an irreverent one, Reader, we cannot help expressing the wish that this truly divine curtailment of wicked occurrences in our world had taken place still oftener, and to a still greater extent.

Again reverting to the topic with which he opened this discourse

Jesus, for the third time, refers to false Christs and false prophets; and again warns the disciples against being deceived thereby. This singular and unflattering injunction—which one would

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.

23 Then if any man say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

have thought could not possibly be needed at all—thus so often repeated, shows us how necessary Jesus deemed it; shows us that even amidst all the coming troubles and calamities he was here forecasting, Jesus felt that the uppermost and most urgent need of men was to beware of false Christs and false prophets. A deeply significant fact.

“For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders.” What, Reader, was poor humanity to do amidst all these Christs and prophets with their great signs and wonders? When John sent to inquire of Jesus whether he were the Christ or not, Jesus, we may remember, sent word back to John of the marvels and wonders he,

Jesus, was displaying. Here we are assured that great signs and wonders will likewise be shown by false Christs and false prophets.

Well, indeed, may it be asked, what were men to think and to do? What ought we to do now if a person appeared showing great signs and wonders? Ought men to turn a cold shoulder to him, or receive and welcome him?

The plain truth is that in those days men's minds were completely saturated with supernaturalism. To them the Universe was governed, not by the constant laws of Nature, but by the direct meddling and the dual caprice of heaven and of hell. What wholesomeness of mind could possibly co-exist with such beliefs? Supernaturalism is simply demoralizing to the human faculties. How, less than three centuries ago, the belief in devilism could distort and debase the minds of even Courts of Justice sorrowfully show us. Once men leave go of the natural all becomes chaos.

As we read these verses who can help a feeling of pity and of sympathy for the peoples of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, for whom and for whose reserve to the great signs and wonders they witnessed, Jesus has in store a punishment and a destiny so frightful and appalling?

The signs and wonders displayed by these false Christs and false prophets were to be of so formidable a character that, “if possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Much wrangling has taken place over this sentence, the two rival schools of Christian doctrine keenly debating the true import of it. Far be it from us to meddle

in such a matter. But if the very elect could be in real jeopardy from such a cause it is evident how extremely dangerous must have been the condition of other folks.

Most excellent advice, pithily and happily expressed. The allusions to "deserts" and "secret chambers" are keen thrusts at the usual mystic and hole-and-corner ways of religious claimants. The arts and methods of those interesting practitioners are capitally hit off in this admirable passage.

"Believe it not." Would that mankind had acted upon this admirable injunction! Leaving Christianity, on the principle of present company, out of consideration and reference for the moment, what a blessed thing it would indeed have been if the advice to "go not forth" and to "believe it not" had been applied to all religious founders! Had this wise and worthy exhortation but been carried out in all ages, the world would have been freed from all the huge religious systems which have cursed the vast bulk of our race with their baneful and, alas! enduring sway.

If the heinousness of a sin is to be measured by the evil of its consequences, credulity simply dwarfs all other crimes. No other quality or defect of the human organization has produced results comparable to the grievous and disastrous ones wrought by credulity. The very worst feature of all the religious founders is the praise they give to easy and ready faith as applied to themselves, though denouncing it as applied to others. Whether in religion or in anything else easy faith is a grave dereliction of human duty.

"Go not forth." "Believe it not." Right noble, precious, and worthy advice. Reader, this is our favourite passage of Scripture.

What a simile! The coming of the Son of man is here likened unto lightning, which, according to Jesus, "cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west"; a description of the phenomenon that we are unable in any of its senses to admire or appreciate. A more unfortunate object to

liken a supposed auspicious, beneficial, and universal event unto than the electric discharge here singled out for the purpose it would be hard to conceive. No effect in Nature is less susceptible of comparison to anything good or worthy than lightning. It is transient, merely local, and highly dangerous, though now happily

26 Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

controllable ; and it is the very epitome of capriciousness. It may be said that Jesus merely uses the simile as regards the suddenness it exemplifies. This may or may not be the case. But even so regarded it is not felicitous ; for instead of being unexpected, lightning as a general rule is heralded by unmistakeable premonitory indications. A little further on Jesus compares his coming to a thief breaking into a house. We are not, we hope, given to carping ; but we entirely fail to see why metaphors and expressions that would be deservedly derided in others should be tolerated in religious founders.

This strange verse feels as though it has got out of its proper place ; for it has no visible pertinence to what precedes or follows it. The carcase and the eagles or vultures here spoken of have received endless explications at the hands of theologians.

The most usual one is that the carcase means the Jewish nation and the eagles the Roman army. Happily it is not necessary to determine the question. Some commentators think the phrase was a proverb ; and it has certainly the look of one.

We approach this paragraph with the consciousness that it is probably the most grave and important passage in this Gospel history. The supernatural character and claims of Jesus of Nazareth are here at stake, and must stand or fall with the judgment that may be pronounced upon the truth or untruth of the statements he here makes.

29 ¶ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken :

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven ; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

angels be sent to gather the elect from the four winds and from one end of heaven to the other.

Jesus fixes the time when these immense events were to take place. It was to be "immediately after the tribulation of those days" ; that tribulation which he has just been describing to these disciples in the manner we have seen. He again fixes it by saying,

“So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near even at the doors.” And he absolutely fixes it a third time by the declaration, “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.”

The generation then living has long since passed away; but the colossal events above named have not transpired. We are thus face to face with the fact that Jesus stands charged with a great prediction that has not simply not been fulfilled, but which has been totally confuted.

As is well known, Christian apologists have put forth the most strenuous exertions to explain, and explain away, this disastrous prediction of their master. But they have not succeeded even in mitigating it, much less in accounting for it. There it stands and there it remains, despite a host of honest efforts to deal with it, and a still greater host of dishonest efforts to distort it. And it proclaims and testifies to all the world that its author was but a member of our noble but fallible human race.

It is extremely instructive to examine the items and elements of which this imposing prediction is composed. It is the usual custom of Christian commentators, after setting before us one or other of the various devices that have been suggested for adjusting and deferring the very inconvenient date fixed by Jesus for the fulfilment of his prophecy, to proceed to bestow upon it some very highly pitched eulogies on the ground of its asserted intrinsic qualities. We are told that the prediction of Jesus laid before us in these verses is inherently very fine; awfully solemn; stupendously impressive; and we are assured that at the due and proper time, to which apologists have adjourned it, it will all come to pass. On this latter point we have nothing to say, except that we should much have preferred any great changes in our Universe to have been in the direction of improvement, rather than, as here represented, of injury; and on this ground we sincerely hope that the purely physical portions of this prophecy may long continue overdue and unfulfilled.

But with regard to the praises and the adjectives usually applied by Christian commentators to this prophecy of Jesus on the score of its inherent merits, we have, Reader, no option but to state in accordance with the prime purpose of this work, the impressions left upon our own mind by these verses. And sorry indeed are we to have a duty so unfeignedly unpleasant. For to us this

prophecy of Jesus is fine only in the sense in which the book of Revelation and inferior poetry may also be termed fine—that is, the objects dealt with are imposing in themselves, and the words applied to them are of a very sounding character. But of real or impressive descriptive power or of true sublimity we are absolutely unable to discern a trace in these verses; nay, to us they are even painfully commonplace. And they have ignorance of the true constitution of the Universe stamped on their every line and every thought.

“The sun be darkened.” This occurrence may be taken either as a quenching or a mere obscuring of our great luminary. Nor is there anything to show us whether we ought to regard it as a permanent or only a temporary thing. Nor yet is any reason given or conceivable why the destruction or withholding of daylight should be necessary to the events here following it.

“And the moon shall not give her light.” As the Moon has no light of her own to give, moonlight being only second-hand sunlight, it is obvious the cessation of the latter would involve cessation of the former.

“And the stars shall fall from heaven.” It is impossible to form any conception of where these vast bodies will alight or make their way to. Nor can the faintest reason be conjectured why these great suns, lying, in the nearest case, two thousand times the distance away of our own solar mass, should be disturbed on account of what follows. For there is nothing whatever in the sequel—the mourning of the tribes of the earth at the appearance of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven, and the appearance of his angels with trumpets to gather the elect from the four winds—to in any way require or render appropriate such vast and remote physical convulsions.

“The powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” To this phrase commentators candidly own their inability to assign any intelligible meaning. Whether the powers thus named are personal or impersonal, and what is to be deduced from their being shaken, it is vain to conjecture. In the next Gospel they are termed “the powers that are in heaven.” And in the version of this discourse found in the third Gospel an additional physical portent, if so ordinary an incident may be so called, is added to those already enumerated here, to the effect that at the time of the convulsions here described the sea and the waves will roar.

Christian apologists of the last two or three centuries profess to believe that Jesus was quite aware that he and his disciples were then standing on a tiny planet whose relative importance in its own system was very secondary, and whose relative importance in the Universe was very nearly nil; and that he was perfectly cognizant of what and where the stars were, as indeed, having created them, how could he fail to be? They tell us, however, that in accordance with the humbling practice of accommodation to current ignorances adopted by all religious founders, Jesus, instead of unfolding the true nature and constitution of the Universe, adopted the misleading terms of his contemporaries; just as he did with devilism, which instead of nobly confuting, he did all he could to rivet and confirm. For sixteen centuries humanity and enlightenment had to struggle against and often to succumb to these humiliating and disastrous accommodations of Jesus; and now his followers defend his knowledge at the expense of his veracity in much the same way as believers in omnipotent-theism defend the power of their deity at the cost of his goodness.

“The sign of the Son of man in heaven.” This is another confessed enigma. Conjectures on the point vary greatly according to taste and inclination; the favourite suggestion apparently being that this sign will be in the form of a cross.

“The tribes of the earth.” This, presumably, is a name for mankind collectively; though some think that by the earth Judea only is meant. Be this as it may, at the sight of the sign of the Son of man “all the tribes of the earth shall mourn,” says Jesus. In our judgment, Reader, the first coming of all the religious founders has been the cause of great mourning to the human race. But the final coming of any one of them to adjudicate upon our species will manifestly be a calamitous and appalling event indeed.

“They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.” We may remember that when he was at Cæsarea Philippi, Jesus had informed these disciples that “the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” At his trial, Jesus also told the high priest that “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

In what sense these assertions were ever made good, we do not

know. In their natural meaning these promises were certainly never redeemed; and the variety of alternative meanings offered by apologists shows us conclusively that to them even the phrases thus used by Jesus convey no real meaning except the discarded natural one.

Statements whose meaning is alleged to be other than their apparent and natural signification are entirely unworthy of human time and thought. Secondary and occult meanings may be ascribed to words at pleasure and without limit. The humbling reconciliations of the Bible to modern Science—yes, Reader, of Scripture to Science, not, as once, of Science to Scripture—so plentifully provided in these later times, like some of the achievements of Gospel harmonists, show us that, given the wish to escape an obvious conclusion, nothing is too inane to proffer as affording the means.

“They shall gather together his elect from the four winds.” Had this event taken place at the time fixed the elect would have been a very small gathering when thus got together; and there is much that makes us fear it will be so whenever this postponed occurrence may transpire. Whenever the second advent of Jesus or any other religious founder may take place the tribes of the earth will have great occasion to mourn.

Unhappy angels! for who can forget the painful task that, after sifting the elect from the four winds, will then await them? For are they not then to gather together all the human tares and “cast them into a furnace of fire”? In poetry and piety we often meet with the wish to become an angel; but if becoming an angel of necessity involved the duty that will thus fall upon some at least of those beings, we would for ourselves earnestly implore to be spared the destiny. We would choose non-existence or existence of the very humblest kind in preference to the angelic at the price of casting one single human being into a furnace of fire.

From the imposing if not impressive ideas dealt with in the

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors.

preceding verses our thoughts are suddenly transferred to the very modest but much more agreeable subject of the budding of a fig tree. But somehow, Reader, instead of dwelling upon leaves and tender branches our thoughts seem more disposed to rest upon that fig tree which was then, presumably, still standing

withered somewhere near Bethany for the strange crime of not bearing figs out of season. One cannot have had one's mind dwelling upon a darkened Sun and Moon, tumbling stars, a mourning earth, and the appalling religious harvest of the human race, and at once be in a frame to think of spring-time and the bursting forth of vegetation.

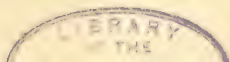
Jesus' reference to a fig tree is for the purpose of a "parable." When a fig tree putteth forth leaves, ye know, says Jesus, "that summer is nigh." "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the door." We must own our inability to perceive in this simile any tolerable appropriateness. The putting forth of leaves by a fig tree is a very slow and very gradual process; whereas Jesus had assured these disciples but a moment ago that the coming of the Son of man would be like lightning.

And is there not something singular, indeed trivial, in telling people that, "when ye shall see all these things," they may know that "it is near, even at the door"?

Few things are more painful to read, and in the worst sense of the word more humbling than Christian comments on this verse. And well may they be when we consider that Christian commentators believe it their duty to try to persuade themselves and others that the plain and natural meaning of this verse was not the one intended by their master.

Of the many artifices used for this melancholy purpose it is not necessary to enter into the consideration here. It may just be observed that it is, perhaps, the most general expedient to ask us to accept the destruction of Jerusalem in satisfaction of "all these things." But if that very small poundage be accepted in full discharge of this verse, we are no nearer a solution; for the other things had to follow "immediately after." It may serve to give a general idea of the straits and the distress of Christian commentators in dealing with this subject to say, that in explanation of the word "immediately" there is offered to us on eminent authority the brilliant thought that as a thousand years are but as one day with Jesus, he here spoke of time from his own standpoint! Another brilliant suggestion much used is, that this "generation" means the Jewish race, which has not, we are happy to say, entirely passed away. But this bright thought is equally vain, for it does

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.



not meet the Galilean declaration of the coming of the Son of man ere some then present had tasted death.

We need hardly say that the early Christians used none of these sophistries. They were not then needed. They took Jesus at his word, and daily expected the plain and straightforward fulfilment of his predictions. And Peter, who heard this discourse delivered, and who had opportunities of further inquiring of Jesus on the subject, of which there is nothing improbable in supposing he availed himself, writes, that "the end of all things is at hand."

A little further on, Jesus declares that the day and the hour of his coming are known to no man, not even to the angels; and, according to what we find in the next Gospel are not known even to Jesus himself. That famous admission has grievously perplexed orthodox theologians, though, as is well known, they have risen to the occasion, and by the celebrated theory of suspended omniscience have obviated the difficulty; though Unitarian theologians declare that they have thereby only trifled with and evaded the problem. Is it not clear, Reader, that this suspended omniscience of Jesus, however accounted for, applied not only to the day and to the hour, but to the generation of his second coming also?

By the passing away of heaven and of earth have been variously understood their transformation and their annihilation respectively. Peter assures us in his second epistle that the heavens and the earth are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men; but we have already found that the statements of the chief apostle on such subjects are not to be literally relied upon. Paul—or at any rate the Epistle to the Hebrews—also assures us that the heavens and the earth shall perish; though immediately afterwards the statement is added that they shall wax old, and shall be folded up as a vesture and shall be changed. The eventual fate of our little planet and its companions in space cannot, we think, be scripturally determined with any degree of certitude. In the meantime there is no immediate reason to apprehend the occurrence, whatever its nature, laid down in this verse. We have every confidence that the predictions of those true prophets the astronomers, whose forecasts take place to the minute, however remote, will have their astronomical fixtures for the coming century duly verified.

35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

"But my words shall not pass away." It must be admitted

that the dicta of all the religious founders are remarkably enduring; and it may be hoped of some portion of them that they may continue to endure. But of many of their utterances, and of none more so than of some of the utterances of the Prophet of Nazareth, it may be sincerely hoped that if they may not pass away entirely, they may be long suffered to remain unredeemed and in abeyance.

The declaration that "that day and hour" are known to no man,

36 ¶ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

nor yet to the angels, but to Jehovah only, affords no difficulty. But the memorable addition found in the next Gospel that they are

not known to Jesus himself has produced much and perennial commotion in the theological world. We are almost inclined to think that the perplexities thus occasioned to Trinitarian theologians have been well nigh compensated for by the marvels of exposition, by the masterly examples of the noble science of Scripture exegesis, and by the surpassing skill with which this celebrated difficulty has been obviated.

Days and hours are certainly very minute sections of time, and, of course, purely mundane ones, whose pertinence to the angels of heaven is not clear. Hours are purely artificial markings of time, and days only hold good to and are produced by each planet on its own account; and it hardly seems that the angels of heaven, where there is no day nor night, could be much interested in or cognizant of our own or any other planetary time-scale. With Jehovah the precise earthly day and hour of the event here alluded to must, of course, be included in his general omniscience. It is, we take it, reasonable to suppose that Jesus himself is no longer ignorant on the point.

Immediately after this declaration in the third Gospel, Jesus warns the disciples against being "overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth." What with comparisons to lightning, to a snare, to a thief, and to the budding of a fig tree, these disciples must have been almost as bewildered as commentators now are.

Jesus now proceeds to give some specific indications and illustra-

37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also

tions of the state of affairs that will be existing amongst mankind at the date of the coming of

the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

the Son of Man; and a singular list they are.

The first of these indications is that the state of things amongst men when that coming takes place will be "as the days of Noe were"; and "as the days that were before the flood." There is no disguising the fact that this is an alarming and most discouraging statement. The

days before the flood and the times of Noe were not ideal times; if the description of them given in the Pentateuch may be accepted, they were times of flagrant and shocking depravity. We seem thus driven to the truly melancholy conclusion that mankind, instead of progressing to the end, must have lamentably backslided in the latter—now future—times. In our estimation this is the most disheartening and enervating prophecy anywhere to be found; worse by far than the darkened Sun and Moon and dislocated stars, even. The great and blessed improvements that have been effected in human affairs since the days of Noe give us the inspiring belief that we are moving on to better things still. The depressing fact here divulged by Jesus that the condition of affairs at the end of the human race will be a relapse and degradation to the worse than savagery of the days before the flood, is simply appalling. And surely such a final condition of humanity is a very lugubrious tribute to the influence of that Gospel which, as we know, will then have been preached the world over. Such a picture is as truly paralyzing to evangelists as to reformers.

Perhaps some little alleviation of this gloomy forecast may be seen or imagined in the particular details of the condition of things in the days of Noe quoted by Jesus; possibly it may be thought that the final state of the world may be like that of pre-diluvian times in some points and in them only. We fear there is little ground for this view. For not only in the preceding verse is the comparison a general one, but in these verses also the allusions are of a very sinister and comprehensive kind.

There is, indeed, nothing necessarily disquieting in the statements that in the final age our race will be found eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage. Were those time-honoured customs to cease, the human species would come to an end without any extraneous help. And to us, at least, there is something distinctly and eminently reassuring in the fact that the institution of

marriage had continued to the end; its preservation being to our judgment no mean proof that wisdom and virtue had not totally disappeared from mankind.

At the same time we fear the terms "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," in the connection we here find them, were meant to be taken in their sensual and not in their honourable signification.

The "days of Noe" certainly extended over a lengthened period, for he was six hundred years of age when he entered the ark, and lived an additional three hundred and fifty years after he came out. The particular "days of Noe" here referred to were no doubt those immediately preceding the flood; for there is no reason for supposing that the first five centuries of Noah's days were times of special wickedness also. Indeed, just before the account of the deluge, we read that the "sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair and took them wives"; that the latter bare to the sons of God "mighty men," "men of renown"; and that "there were giants in the earth in those days"; all which leads us rather to the conclusion that it was only the particular generation preceding the deluge that was so exceedingly wicked.

It is certainly melancholy to reflect, too, that the flood as a reforming agency was a failure. According to Mosaic accounts men became as wicked as ever afterwards. Indeed, in the account of this portion of the present discourse given in the third Gospel as delivered by Jesus to some Pharisees before his arrival in Jerusalem, this reference to the days of Noe as resembling those in the coming of the Son of man is followed by the ensuing passage, "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." On the whole the times following the deluge seem to have been worse than those preceding it, and must have led to frequent renewed regret on the part of Jehovah that he ever made man. One can hardly help wondering whether in these latter ages that divine regret is still experienced. Gloomy indeed is the impression of the final condition of mankind as gathered from these references of Jesus thereto.

"When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the

earth?" is a question Jesus propounds in the third Gospel. But as he did not vouchsafe any answer to that very curious question we are left in a state of anxious suspense on the point.

A less depressing exegesis of the present passage adopted by some is to confine the analogy between the time of the coming of the Son of man and the "days of Noe" to the one point of resemblance in the sudden oncoming of the deluge and of the second advent. We hope this more cheerful view is an authentic one, and that similarity between the days of Noe and the last days of our race in other respects is not a necessary inference. It was the practice of the Prophet of Nazareth, as of other founders, to so word his declarations as to often leave great scope and much free play to interpreters; a privilege of which the "household of faith" has liberally availed itself.

So sudden will the coming of the Son of man be that people will be surprised and come down upon thereby in the midst of their ordinary daily avocations. From this we may gather that the event in question will not occur on the Sabbath; unless the depravity of the final members of our race has reached the pitch of entirely disregarding that institution.

This form of advent is certainly more in accordance with the simile of lightning, and with the term snare—for the best of men might thus be found in attitudes very inappropriate to the occasion—than with the image of a budding fig tree. Most religious founders are fonder of the catastrophic than the gradual.

This unannounced and sudden swoop will have apparently the redeeming feature of taking place not at night, but in the day; hence people will be found at their ordinary daily pursuits, unless the event be simultaneous the world over, in which case it will come upon many in the night and in sleep. "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." It has been much discussed as to what should be understood by "taken" and what by "left"; and whether the Christian will be the one taken or the one left. There are no means of determining these interesting problems. All that can be made out is that there would seem to be a sort of separate day of judgment for the then living population of the globe; a visible and earthly separation of the then human sheep and human goats. This, however, is a very minor event compared with the judgment of all the risen dead.

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

The process of grinding here described now exists in a few of the most backward countries of the globe only; human invention having entirely dispensed with it in all the leading nations. Jesus thus confined himself even in picturing this final and universal event, as he did in every other respect, to local and often now obsolete or well-nigh obsolete customs.

41 Two women shall
be grinding at the mill;
the one shall be taken,
and the other left,

It seems, however, that women will be grinding at the mill up to the very last. It thus appears that the improved processes practised by the higher races will never become quite universal; or that the final generations of mankind will have backslided in the industrial arts as well as in other things.

As with those in the field, so here the two women engaged in grinding will be separated by the coming of the Son of man; one of these women being taken, the other left. Religious differences will thus persist to the end. The purpose and result of his first mission to our earth were truly described by Jesus in the words, "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother." In his second mission, Reader, he will not set them at earthly variance, but will everlastingly sever them. One of these women will be placed in a furnace of fire. The other will spend her eternal existence in the new Jerusalem with its streets of gold singing praises to the lamb. To our thinking, both these women are to be deeply pitied.

Though profitless, it is hardly possible to help picturing to ourselves in some fashion or other the way in which these two women will be thus severed, and how the one taken will be borne away. How and whither the one thus taken will be transported will, of course, vary in our surmises according to our supposition of the taking being the fortunate or unfortunate process. The more general theory seems to be that the taken one is the happy one. It is supported by, and probably based upon the statement of Paul that he and others would be caught up in the air. But certain Gospel expressions we have met with would lead to the opposite conclusion.

However this may be, we can form no picture of the severance of these two women that is not painful; painful alike in the process and in its consequences. And how any possible diversity of mental attitude to religious problems on the part of these two women could justify two destinies so diverse is to us simply unthinkable.

Eating and drinking; marrying and giving in marriage; two in

a field, one taken and one left; two women grinding at a mill, one taken and one left. Such is the description, such are the indications of the state of human affairs that will exist at the time of the coming of the Son of man here presented to us by Jesus; such is the enlightenment here vouchsafed to us.

Pious people are in the habit of telling us we ought to be thankful for small mercies, and for the smallest heavenly condescensions. But we cannot agree that the trivialities here set before us by Jesus come under even those modest categories. That we are not to know the time or circumstances of the event in question would at least have been an intelligible and straightforward position. Or that some worthy and appropriate tokens should have been given to us on the subject would also have been comprehensible and gracious. But what is here tendered to us on the subject by Jesus is not becoming to or worthy of the occasion itself, and is neither respectful to man nor honouring to heaven. But then there is no representation of heaven and of its mode of dealing with us laid down by the various religious founders that is not humbling to us and to heaven alike; and especially to the latter.

It may be observed that some commentators of repute profess that these verses refer not to the end of the world, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, which they say was one form of the "coming" of the Son of man. It does not do much credit to Jesus as a prophet that pious scholars cannot agree whether what purport to be grave predictions refer to a local event that took place eighteen centuries ago, or to the yet to come end of the world. "Prophecies" of such a kind are little honoring either to the prophet or to his hearers.

We have just seen how sudden and unheralded the coming of the Son of man was to be. To watch for that

42 ¶ Watch therefore;
for ye know not what
hour your Lord doth
come.

event in the sense of being constantly on the look-out for it, hardly seems to subserve any perceivably useful purpose. This command to

watch may probably be taken as an exhortation to personal preparedness in case the event should take place rather than as an injunction to be continually looking for and expecting it. As applied to these disciples this injunction to watch for the Son of man's coming would have a meaning it does not now possess; for they would naturally expect to be witnesses of that coming—a fear or hope few can now entertain.

It is always a human duty to prepare for any serious event that

must come, or that with reasonable probability may come. To prepare for a more or less improbable contingency, though not a duty, may—if the preparation therefor be of an otherwise beneficial kind—be wise and prudent also.

That mankind should look for, or act on the expectation of, the world's coming to an end, would be a line of conduct, not only not commendable but highly chimerical and pernicious. All worthy human efforts and aims are grounded, and justly and properly grounded, upon the firm belief in the constancy, continuance, and permanence of the laws of that Nature of which we are ourselves a part.

The belief in the imminence of the end of the world is one of the very worst and most paralyzing beliefs that the human mind can entertain. The effects that belief had upon the early Christians who firmly believed the coming of their Lord to be impending, and the end of all things at hand; the wretched effects produced by constant scares upon the subject in the Middle Ages; and the fantastic influence upon enthusiasts who have since persuaded themselves of the imminence of such an occurrence, all show, what is indeed in itself manifest, that the belief in question is one of the most injurious that can possibly lay hold of the human mind. How different from such trumpery notions are the splendid discoveries of Science—the teachings of the true Revelation—which, apart even from their beneficent practical results, are as wholesome as they are magnificent!

A highly humorous verse. Jesus here likens his own coming to the coming of a thief! a simile that Christians would justly deride had it been used by anyone but their master. But this is not the only diverting feature of this verse, for the illustration here used confutes the very object it is brought forward to sustain. "If the goodman of the house had known." It is, however, the unfortunate fact that a thief does not make known to the good man of the house what hour he intends to visit his house; and on this point there is no denying that the simile holds good. But the very worst thing that the good man of the house could do would be to be constantly watching for the coming of the thief. "If he had known," he would certainly, as Jesus states, have watched; but if he had not known then he most decidedly and properly would not have watched. It would be far

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

better for this good man to composedly run the risk of having his house ransacked rather than to live in a state of nightly apprehension of and watching for the coming of this thief.

The exegesis now applied to this verse exemplifies the not unfamiliar fact that an original meaning may be so departed from as to become inverted even. This verse is now a very familiar one on tombstones, and the favourite text for funeral sermons. All this is arrived at by the simple process of converting the Son of man's coming into man's own individual going away at death; in spite of the obvious fact that the original meaning of this coming of the Son of man involved the escape of death to those prepared ones who were to witness the event and who were "ready" for it. Such an exegesis also reduces a supposed immense, instantaneous, and universal event into a detail of everyday occurrence.

Though we entirely reject the meaning now commonly conferred upon this verse, it may be observed that preparation for our death is by common consent an imperative duty with every man. To dwell upon our death is as useless as it is pernicious; but to plainly recognize the fact as a certainly coming, and possibly an early approaching, event, and to make all the needful provisions for the changes which the termination of our earthly career will involve to others, is a paramount obligation, non-fulfilment of which is a very serious dereliction of human duty.

Of preparations for eternity we can only say that we entirely decline to recognize any of them as a human duty. To prepare his immortal soul for the eternity which awaits it would be man's chief duty, no doubt, assuming the known truth of the suppositions that man has a soul, that there is an eternity of existence to prepare it for, and that the preparation proposed to be applied is the proper one. But as the first two suppositions labour under great doubt and uncertainty, and the third under greater still, we entirely refuse to recognize any such preparations as in any way a real human obligation. It may be said that preparations for eternity are in themselves good and beneficial here. To a large extent this allegation may be true, for undoubtedly all religious systems inculcate and patronize many of the moral duties and proprieties, and enjoin as pleasing to heaven many useful and excellent things. But all the many and various preparations for eternity contain a great deal that is neither useful, nor wholesome,

nor excellent; and to this statement the many varieties of Christian preparation are no exception.

A homely illustration of the subject in hand in the shape of a

45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

47 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

49 And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

50 The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

contrast between the conduct and fate of a good servant and the conduct and fate of a bad one, brings this portentous chapter, though not apparently the discourse itself, to a close.

The good and faithful servant is found when visited by his lord to be attending to and conscientiously discharging his duties; and is rewarded by being made ruler over all the lord's goods. The general lesson and significance to be derived from this latter fact are not good to make out; for it is an extreme reward capable of one application only.

"But and if that evil servant" be found on an unexpected visit of his lord to be neglecting his duties and misconducting himself, why then the lord, says Jesus, "shall cut him asunder"—whatever that may mean; and place him with the hypocrites—presumably the Scribes and Pharisees—whose occupation will

be weeping and gnashing of teeth, apparently in perpetuity.

A sense of proportion as of discrimination seems to have been practically absent in most religious founders. With them men are simply good men or bad men; sheep or goats; wheat or tares. In many creeds men are simply toys in the hand of Fate; a theory that finds one of its worst and most cynical expressions in the division of men into elect and non-elect made by this Christian system. Hence the many heavens and hells which in accordance with and to match the theory await the two sections of our race respectively. Discrimination, gradation, measurement, and proportioning are tedious processes quite beneath the notice of the various lordly personages who have so kindly furnished mankind with religious systems.

MATTHEW XXV.

PARABLES based upon customs of a purely local kind and now no longer in existence, as this and other of Jesus' parables are based, convey the moral they contain or intend at a great disadvantage. The medium thus used has become strange and unfamiliar; requires indeed to be itself explained in order to be intelligible at all.

CHAPTER XXV.
 1 *The parable of the ten virgins, 14 and of the talents, 31 Also the description of the last judgment.*

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

When parables are used for the purpose not of frustrating comprehension, as they sometimes were, but of assisting it, it is very necessary they should be founded upon something of a simple, obvious, and universal nature. Even then there is no danger of the moral conveyed thereby being unduly visible.

The wedding customs of the ancient Jews, judging from the specimen here laid before us, seem to have been singular enough, and such as would now commend themselves to few tastes. For a number of virgins to go out with lamps to meet a bridegroom at midnight seems an arrangement that might have been invented for the purpose of producing the greatest possible discomfort to all the parties concerned.

Whether the division of these virgins into an exactly equal number of wise ones and foolish ones contains any lesson for us we cannot say. Some pious people are much given to discerning hidden lessons and meanings in the slightest allusions of their holy writ. On the other hand, theologians are fond of warning us not to be overwise in pressing meanings out of, or rather into, the details of these divine parables. And it is not a little diverting to find in some cases those who have warned us against any rash inference from the division of these virgins into five wise and five foolish, proceeding to discover and expatiate upon deep spiritual meanings in the oil, the vessels, and the lamps alluded to in these verses. We need hardly say that these articles have widely different significations to the minds of different expositors. There is, however, a touching unanimity in the caution given to readers against falling into the

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

natural but dangerous fallacy that the first of the articles in question—oil, spiritually understood—is on sale.

“The bridegroom tarried.” Punctuality is a very great virtue at all times. The want of it is nothing short of a trespass and an immorality. In anything fixed to take place at or about such an hour as midnight promptitude is doubly called for. No doubt unforeseen delays are liable to occur at weddings as on all other occasions; and it may be that the bridegroom’s tarrying was enforced and not voluntary. If avoidable, it was an unpardonable incivility. In any case it was quite time to effect a fundamental reform in the very disagreeable and unseemly wedding custom here laid before us.

“They all slumbered and slept.” The bridegroom’s delay seems to have been prolonged; so much so, that all the virgins, the wise not less than the foolish, fell off to sleep.

“The bridegroom cometh.” This temporarily important individual at last made his appearance. Everyone is willing for the time being to accord a preposterous importance to a bride and a bridegroom. No one but a born churl will refuse to unbend on such an occasion, and help in scattering relative importance, and other ill-timed sobrieties to the winds for a little while.

On being aroused, these sleeping, and no doubt still sleepy, virgins proceeded to trim their lamps. And here trouble began. The five foolish maidens had not brought with them sufficient oil, and found on waking that their lamps had gone out. It is reasonable and probable to suppose that their oil would have been ample if the

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.
8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

bridegroom had made his appearance at the ordinary time; but his delay had rendered their preparation on this point inadequate. The five wise maidens had allowed a larger margin for contingencies. But clearly not a very much larger one; for on being asked by their five companions for some of their stock, these very wise maidens had to reply, “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.” It is clear that if this bridegroom had tarried but a little longer, these wise virgins would have been in the same position as the foolish ones. How very little, Reader, is often the difference in all things between those who just hit and those who

just miss! A truth that evidently holds in spiritual as well as in earthly things.

“But go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.”

9 But the wise answered, saying, *Not so*; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

This reply of these wiser virgins certainly seems a selfish and ungracious one. It cannot, at least, be termed a generous or self-sacrificing one; and as applied to the case of this incident in its natural sense solely, it was a shabby and unfeeling response.

Theologians are careful to assure us that religious merit and religious acquirements are not transferable. However willing to do so, it is not possible for an elect sister to make over to her non-elect sister any portion of her own spiritual gifts and merits; nor is it possible for the most devout mother to make over to her graceless child the smallest quantity of her own maternal spiritual deserts. This species of religious self-sacrifice, even if desired to be made, is not permissible.

This may seem a prosaic and not a very chivalrous theory, but we cannot say it is an unreasonable one. We are not wanting, we hope and think, in a due reverence and appreciation of generosity and self-sacrifice; but we own to scant sympathy with quixotic forms of those qualities. We deny any claim of a spendthrift brother upon his thrifty brother's savings, and so likewise in other matters also. Lovable as generosity is, it becomes unlovable after reasonable limits are reached. In the given case before us, taken in its purely natural sense, we consider these wiser virgins acted meanly in not sharing any oil they had with their sisters. But accepting the ordinary spiritual application of this parable, we are certainly at a loss to see how these five wise virgins could possibly share their eternal salvation with their five lost companions.

It appears the five virgins did as recommended by their wise

sisters; and in so doing justified to our thinking the title of foolish virgins. It was not very likely an oil-place would be near at hand, and still less likely that anyone would be in such a place, at such an hour, if found. As the sequel showed, they would have been much

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

better advised had these five virgins gone home. If bridegrooms are not punctual, they cannot, and have no right to, expect things to go smoothly.

It does not appear whether these virgins met with any success in their search for fresh oil; nor does the point seem material. On reaching the house with replenished lamps or otherwise, these distressed maidens found the bridal party had gone in to the marriage "and the door was shut."

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

In response to these virgins' request for admission, the bridegroom replied, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." The truthfulness of this statement seems open to much doubt; but the courtesy and manners of such a reply are open to none.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

The picture of a bridegroom harshly closing the door at midnight in the faces of a number of virgins, who, even if possessed of insufficient oil to keep their torches going—a fact apparently ascribable to the dilatoriness of this bridegroom himself—had put themselves to great inconvenience to come and do honour to his wedding ceremony, is a picture unique indeed.

Speaking of this parable in its natural aspect, and without reference to its supposed spiritual signification, this boor of a bridegroom would, we think and hope, find after such an incident that a good many doors would be closed to him; and—for it is an undoubted fact that even foolish virgins have often goodly lovers and brothers—it is not unlikely that this bridegroom might meet with resentings of his disgraceful conduct still less to his taste.

So ends this chivalrous allegory.

Detailed spiritual decipherings of this parable of the most varied kinds may be found in theological literature by anyone wishing for them. We can only say once more that it is regrettable to see

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

"the kingdom of heaven likened unto" a picture of such a kind as the one here brought before us. It is not pleasant to see the king of heaven acting in such a manner that, in order to institute a human comparison therewith, the typifying man has to be portrayed, not as a gentle, humane person, but as a coarse, ill-mannered, unfeeling one. To us such teaching seems deplorable and unedifying in all its bearings. The only elevating idea of a God is to think of him as a good man without man's failings. But all the pictures of a deity given us by religious founders make him a huge compound partly of man's excellencies but principally of man's failings. There is no deity known to us

that will bear comparison in all the nobler aspects with a real, much less an ideal, good man.

Jesus' own application of his parable, given in this verse, he has already twice enjoined in the last chapter. Due preparation for any certain or probable coming event is an obvious prudence. And from a religious point of view the provision of a due amount of oil and means of grace, supposing the proper kind to be certainly known, is a very palpably wise precaution. But incessant watching seems to us not wholesome, but very much the reverse. The wise virgins slumbered and slept as well as the foolish ones. And do not the repentant thief on the cross and many edifying death-bed repentances, show us how effectual and ample hurried eleventh-hour preparations may sometimes be? Whether constant watching or last-hour-preparation adequacy is the worse teaching, would be hard to determine.

We have now reached the last of the parables. No objection can possibly be made against the machinery of this parable on the score of its obscurity or of its local or obsolete character, in its essentials at any rate. The trading and money-making processes to which winning the kingdom of heaven is here likened are of universal and perennial character. At the same time we are happy to say the bond-servants or slaves here referred to no longer exist; and employers who go into a far country and expect to find their capital doubled by others on return would, we hope, not be easily met with. A man who wishes his fortune to be doubled ought to stay and take part in the process, and ought not to be inconsolably disappointed if, even with his personal supervision, that result is not quite accomplished.

On taking his departure into a far country—presumably for mental relaxation or pleasure, after the manner of such lordly individuals—this master called his servants, and amongst other things entrusted three of them with the following little commissions. One was to make £1,700 if silver be understood, £27,000 if gold; another £680 or £11,000; and another £340 or £5,500, into their respective doubles. Some reasonable-minded commentators suggest that some little remuneration for such great services must have been understood; but such trifling details are not named in the parable itself. No

14 ¶ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

doubt there are exceptional individuals with whom it pays best not to have a fixed bargain; but the joy of their lord would, with most employers, in the absence of any stipulated terms, be a very precarious thing for servants to trust to. We need hardly say that we are here referring to the parable in its natural features solely; the right of the king of heaven to be exacting and unreasonable, or to be fabulously generous with us, is a point we do not here deal with.

It is indeed agreeable to read that two out of these three servants,

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made *them* other five talents.

17 And likewise he that *had received* two, he also gained other two.

and seven of these eight talents, came up to expectation. We have not forgotten the many reminders we have met with as to the perilous nature of deductions and inductions from these parable details; and we fully recognize the hazardous nature of the inference that two-

thirds of our race use their talents well, and seven-eighths of opportunities are made good use of. Still it is a pleasing and cheerful one; and the cheerful element in all religions is so scarce that it is well to dwell upon any little we meet with.

In the case of the one talent man, we read that he hid the talent

entrusted to him in the earth; the reason

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

given by himself a little further on for so doing being that he was afraid. He appears

to have been not an idle and certainly not a dishonest man, but simply a very timid one; and it is impossible to deny that there is a large element of risk in trading operations at all times. What would have been the consequence to any of these servants had their trading dealings resulted in the loss, instead of the doubling, of their master's capital—a very possible contingency—there is nothing to show us.

A very common remark is found in Christian commentaries anent this portion of the present parable, to the effect that it is true to fact, inasmuch as great gifts—great genius, ability, wealth, and opportunities—are as a rule better used than small gifts; that great endowments and capacities are better utilized than small ones. From such a view we entirely dissent. It is, indeed, impossible to lay down anything approaching a positive rule upon such a subject; but in the main we hold the view we have just referred to a very ungrounded one.

Upon this lord's return from the far country which he appears

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

to have found a very attractive one, he proceeded to reckon with his servants. The first to appear was the five-talents servant, bearing with him the five original talents and five additional ones—the fruit of his judicious dealings.

With such excellent service this lord could not fail to be well pleased. Accordingly he extols this servant in very high terms, and justly so; in this differing widely from the mean, ungenerous sentiment found elsewhere, that we are to regard ourselves as unprofitable servants

after having done our best. This lord had received excellent service, and did nothing but bare justice in thus acknowledging it.

“I will make thee ruler over many things.” Mere acknowledgment, however, it is pleasing to find, was not all. This first-rate servant was to be made ruler over many things in recompense for his achievements. In the last chapter we may remember that the servant who was found on duty at the master’s coming was made ruler over “all his goods.” It need hardly be remarked that in an earthly sense, such scales of promotion and reward are only capable of very limited application. Religious founders are, of course, not fettered by such small considerations; and the regal and lavish way in which they dispense their threatened and promised rewards and punishments, is an eminent and striking characteristic of those personages. Who can forget how Jesus, having first given to Peter the power to bind and to loose everything on our planet, afterwards gave the same power to all the other disciples, not excluding even the twelfth? And this chapter is brought to a close by the declaration of Jesus of his intention to repay the ephemeral acts of the human race with everlasting bliss and everlasting punishment respectively. Lavishness is an Asiatic characteristic; and it is to that prolific continent we are indebted for all our religions and religious founders, with the exception of a few very minor and very stunted specimens of Western production.

Between the two-talents man and his lord exactly the same things

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

were said as in the preceding case. It is not easy to see what natural meaning should be ascribed to the phrase “enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” No doubt the appreciation

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

and good will of a master may mean much; and at that time in Oriental countries and to bondservants it implied much. In our times the relations of employers and employed, and the rapid merging and disappearance of the former in vast organizations, make any "joy of their lord" in such a connection not very susceptible of modern realization. Standard lists of payment now so justly enforced by labour leave little room for, and are very much more satisfactory than, sentiment, the operation of which, as we see abundantly shown in these Gospels, is unreliable and prone to display itself in very fitful, inflated, stinted and erratic fashions.

At last came the one-talent man with a very disappointing report.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou has not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

He had not indeed been reckless or dishonest with what had been entrusted to him, and scrupulously returned his talent. But he had not doubled it. He had not misused it, it is true; he had simply not used it at all.

In accounting for his conduct this servant was, it must be owned, remarkably frank and outspoken to his lord, of whom he evidently entertained no very exalted opinion. Amusingly enough, this very unfavourable estimate of himself he had just listened to is entirely endorsed by this lord; an estimate in which in many respects we think readers of this parable will be obliged to concur.

In our bosom, at any rate, a man who goes into a far country and expects to find on his return that his servants have doubled his capital, does not on finding himself disappointed excite the smallest sympathy. A man who, according to his own admission, expects to reap where he has not sown, and to gather where he has not strawed, ought to be left in case of disappointment to do his own weeping and sympathizing.

With this unfruitful one-talent servant this lord was very angry. He declares him to be a wicked and slothful servant. On the other hand, this lord quite admits the accuracy of the description of himself personally which this outspoken bondservant had so frankly sketched. He does not indeed expressly allow that he is a hard man, but he quite

26 His lord answered and said unto him, *Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:*

admits the allegation that he reaps what he has not sown, and gathers what he has not strawed. Any justification of that process is not offered. For the reasonable rights of capital in talents, though not in bondservants, not a little may justly be said; but a less felicitous way of claiming such rights than the one here used cannot well be imagined.

After thus reproaching this unprofitable servant, this lord proceeds to point out to him how he ought to have dealt with his talent. And a surprisingly unsentimental and common-place process it turns out to be. "Thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers," says the lord, "and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." There does not appear any reason why this lord should not have done this for himself. Nor does it transpire whether this was the method by which the five-talents and the two-talents servants had doubled their consignments; but there seems a sort of natural presumption from the lord's express sanction and inculcation of this particular process that it had been.

With most theologians this does not seem to be a very favourite verse; and we are strongly cautioned against drawing a too close spiritual analogy from the somewhat sordid recommendation here enjoined.

Now to our thinking, Reader, there is not a closer and sounder analogy to be found in any parable or parable detail in this entire Gospel than the one suggested here. An investment in one of the religions, taking the security for granted, is superbly lucrative; the usury is something magnificent. Between laying up treasures on earth, which we may remember Jesus so censured some time back, and laying them up in heaven, the analogy is remarkably close, save in the rate of interest, on which point heavenly accumulation renders earthly amassing quite contemptible.

Apparently addressing some others of his staff, the lord now commands the odd talent which had already been duly delivered, or at least tendered, to be taken from its profitless custodian. It is interesting to note how it was to be disposed of.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

It was to be given over to the five-talents servant. Though the two-talent man had also doubled his trust, and used his opportunity quite as well, he is entirely passed over. It is quite true,

that if it be possible to conceive of a talent as one coin or one mass, there would be a practical difficulty in the way of dividing it *pro rata*. But the principle here acted upon was evidently, as is seen from the following verse, quite independent of and unconnected with the little practical difficulty we have alluded to.

In accordance with and in enforcement of the action just recorded, Jesus here re-enunciates the general principle he had propounded a year or two ago in Galilee. Of this principle we have already, though very mildly, given our opinion.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable, like many of its predecessors, and as parables of all sorts are very apt to do, gets rather mixed in its imagery. The profitless servant is not only stripped of his talent,

he is also ordered to be cast into outer darkness. This "outer darkness" has no congruity with what precedes. But taken in conjunction with Jesus' favourite phrase, "weeping and gnashing of teeth," it is not difficult to see what is the fate thus hinted at. Religious founders were very fond of picturing the sufferings ensuing to men from non-compliance with their demands.

Anyone who will take the trouble to put this parable side by side with the dicta of the sermon on the mount dealing with the same matters will be astonished, if not edified, with the wonderful flexibility of Jesus' teaching on practical subjects. The truth is, that just as in doctrinal matters, the diversities, contradictions, and ambiguities found in Jesus' various declarations thereupon have split up his followers from the very first and ever since into jarring sects, each of which may triumphantly point in those varying declarations to its own justification, so also in moral and practical things "Christianity" has been, and may be, claimed as upholding and inculcating utterly antagonistic modes of human conduct, and utterly opposite views of human life and human duty. As religious founders did not give themselves the trouble to be even decently consistent, how is it possible for their followers to be so?

Passing from the special illustration of individual recompense and retribution given in the preceding parable, Jesus goes on to show how he intends to deal with the whole human race at the great investigation day and judgment day which,

31 ¶ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

accompanied by "all the holy angels," he once more here announces that he will come and hold.

This, on the whole, most appalling event is, as we have already seen, long overdue. That it may still continue to be so, that it may for ever continue to be so, must be the wish of every humane man. We cannot but think, Reader, that even the fortunate few who would profit by the realization of any of the many judgment days with which our race has been threatened would be willing to relinquish their bliss, if they could thereby cancel the remainder of the proceedings.

It seems clear that our globe is to be the theatre of this sorrowful drama. After the Sun and the Moon have ceased to shine and the stars have fallen—an ominous beginning—it is not easy, even in imagination, to picture the state of our tiny mother earth. The book of Revelation informs us how the new Jerusalem is illumined without sun; and presumably this day of judgment will be lit up by the same means. Pitch darkness, however, would be a more fitting accompaniment of most of the sketch which fills the remainder of this chapter.

"All nations."

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

This term has given rise to much diverse opinion; the word here rendered all nations being usually used to signify the heathen—non-Jews only. It thus seems uncertain whether "my people Israel" will participate in these proceedings. We may, however, call to mind that special provision for the children

of the kingdom had already, as was fitting, been alluded to by Jesus. The twelve disciples had to sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Whether this ought to be regarded as a great favour is not very clear. To be judged by one's own fellow countrymen seems at first an advantage, as there seem to be many points in which such special sympathy and affinity must tell considerably. But we cannot, notwithstanding this apparently favourable special arrangement, help fearing that the Jews generally will fare as badly as ourselves. It is impossible to forget the early declaration of Jesus consequent upon the little faith he met with in Israel. "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

John, who heard this discourse delivered, and heard doubtless

many references of Jesus to this grim subject which are not recorded, gives us in his great book of Revelation many highly curious additional items concerning the great event here dealt with. One of the most interesting of these items is, that for a thousand years preceding this great event itself Satan is to be bound up. "An angel came down from heaven with a great chain," says John, "and laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and bound him a thousand years." It seems a great pity this happy step was not taken long before. To our great consternation, however, John goes on to tell us that Satan was to be again loosed—with the old result. For he "shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle." Again later on, however, the devil, along with the beast and the false prophet, was finally and permanently thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, into which lake also "death and hell were cast." As bearing upon the remainder of this chapter, John also assures us that books of account of men's actions had been kept, and that men were to be judged by these books; a sensible arrangement that will greatly expedite these melancholy proceedings.

The wording of this passage would almost lead us to think that we are to be judged in batches and nations. The tiresome fiction of a shepherd's amiable and disinterested love for his sheep and his goats, both of which he impartially milks or fleeces and sells, has here a felicitous appropriateness which commentators somehow seem not to perceive or not to remark.

Sheep and goats. Of the symbolism here used to distinguish and classify human beings, insipid and wearisome as it is, it may well be said that it is quite worthy of the purpose for which it is used. The division of mankind into the good

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

and the bad is too vapid to be worth consideration. The division of men into the lost and the saved, supposed to correspond therewith, is inherently as foolish; but it is forced upon religious founders by the necessities of their position. The obvious fact that there cannot be much to choose between the best of the lost and the worst of the saved has led, as we have already observed, to the brilliant suggestion that there may be proportionately little to choose between the fate of the best in hell and the worst in heaven. How do we know, it is asked, that this may not be the

case? Well, we certainly do not know. Unhappily, the advocates of this theory do not know either.

Along with swine, goats seem to have been a special aversion with Jesus. It almost seems surprising he called those animals into being. Thankful, however, men ought to be and are that he did so; for two more useful species are not easily to be named. Thinkers who still adhere to the creation hypothesis need trouble themselves but little with goats and swine. Snakes, tape-worms, bacteria, and endless other products and "designs," will find them ample scope for reflection and for apologetics. Some of the older commentators in dealing with this passage, amusingly forgetful of his alleged creator, deal very heavily with the poor goat. All kinds of aspersions upon him are made; he is termed lascivious, ill-odoured, and otherwise reproached; charges from which we think the ram could not easily be screened, much less exonerated. Besides, are not kids and lambs kids and lambs compulsorily; born so, indeed, and of necessity become sheep and goats respectively? To the school of Christianity which holds the election theory of human vessels and human destinies, the simile of sheep and goats may have a high degree of appropriateness; but as typifying supposed voluntary and responsible human agency, the simile is glaringly incongruous. Such imagery seems any way but a poor introduction to the vast claim to adjudicate upon our species which Jesus now proceeds to assert.

Sheep and goats! A very simple classification certainly. And after our species has been sifted and assorted in the fashion thus named, the sheep will be placed on Jesus' right hand, the goats on his left. A very prevalent human preference concerning our two hands seems thus to be shared in celestial quarters; though it should be remembered that this allocation is merely a transient one for severance only. The goats will be at Jesus' left hand for the time being only. In his heavenly kingdom the left of Jesus' throne will be as enviable as the right, as is shown by the request of the sons of Thunder for the first places on the right and the left respectively, but which they did not succeed in getting the promise of.

Ah, Reader, if by a happy accident this Christian judicial bench—and the same may be said of all the other judgment-seats of a religious kind—got turned round, and the two divisions of humanity thus transposed, what a blessed thing it would be on the score of

numbers! And not on the score of numbers only, but, in our belief, largely on the score of quality and merit likewise. For, apart from such happy reversal, on the left hand of all the religious judgment-seats will assuredly be found the best and worthiest of human kind.

The sifting and sorting is now over, and humanity now cleft finally in twain. The King, whose reference to his father feels very anomalous, proceeds to deliver judgment. He first addresses the happy section, the blessed minority on his right. The men, women, and children on that side of the throne—for the tiresome metaphor of sheep and goats hitherto used must now be dropped to make sense, a trifling requirement religious claimants were never particular about—are bidden to come and inherit the “kingdom” prepared for them at the time of the foundation of the world.

Pleasing indeed it is to find that in passing sentence the grounds thereof are to be assigned, though explanations or judicial processes of any kind on the part of omniscience seem scarcely called for. And doubly pleasing it is to find that the grounds here assigned are, in their way, sound and excellent; and none the worse, but all the better, for being such homely and such familiar ones.

What then, Reader, are the reasons assigned by this king as the ground for awarding eternal bliss to this right-hand section of what we so commonly call our fellow mortals? Why, they are simplicity itself. During their brief earthly span they had practised some simple, ancient, and natural virtues; they had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, received strangers, visited the sick, and also visited those in prison. Such are the amiable acts which have proved the passport to heaven.

The lofty fashion in which the religious founders take the virtues and the humanities under their distinguished patronage, and the way in which they would have us believe that their sanction and approbation impart to virtue and to goodness an additional sanctity, if not, indeed, the whole sanctity those qualities possess, are too inane and ridiculous to be offensive. Virtue and goodness were known and felt and practised before the religious founders were

born, and will, we believe, be known and felt and practised after they are forgotten. In the view that lawgivers and creed founders have honestly, or with good intentions, sought to re-inforce the practice of their enjoined virtues by claiming supernatural sanctions, there is nothing to prevent a general concurrence. At the same time some of the modes in which they have affected to monopolize and to heavily trade upon humanity and virtue for other objects, are deserving of very keen resentment.

Fidelity to the primary purpose of this work compels us, Reader, to record our complete dissent from the ground here assigned for awarding praise to the time-honoured virtues here enumerated. Many of us who, in our own humble way, have fed the hungry and visited the sick, not for the sake of Jesus nor of anyone else, but for the sake of the hungry and the sick, and for no other sake, must respectfully but very firmly decline to have the ground of our acts transferred in the manner here described. Jesus' sake was neither the reason nor the motive of our actions in this matter, as we should plainly declare at the time here referred to, if omniscience on the part of this king did not render any such statement quite superfluous. When the hungry are fed, or the sick visited, for the sake of applause, whether earthly or heavenly, the acts are mercenary to the very last degree.

Before taking their departure to the happy land a short colloquy

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

between these happy human beings, if such they may now be termed, and the king ensued. "I was sick and ye visited me; naked and ye clothed me," the king had just stated. In this world, and it would seem in the next also, a statement is necessarily taken in its natural sense unless seen, or until explained, to be a figure of speech.

A statement so startling as that they had seen this great king naked and sick could scarcely fail to bewilder these happy folks. And with a bluntness and an absence of circumlocution which might with great advantage be adopted in addressing the remaining royalties of our own world, these excellent people ask, "When saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee?"

In reply, the king explains that as they had done these charities unto "these my brethren," they had done them to himself. "My brethren." Things are apt

40 And the King shall answer, and say unto

them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

to get very much mixed in allegorisms, and there is much reason to fear these righteous people would have some little difficulty in grasping what could be meant by the brethren

of so prodigious a being as this king. Whether any kindness shown to any of the vast array on the left, who were evidently not amongst "these my brethren," would count, seems a curious point.

Let us hope, Readers, that the happy fellow creatures of ours last dealt with, had taken their departure before the painful and shocking scene now described took place. To witness the mighty throng on the left ordered into everlasting fire, by a being who had just been posing as the great patron of all the charities, must have frozen the tender hearts of these kindly folks; must have given them a memory that would haunt and chill them even in paradise; and must have filled them with deep misgivings, more especially if they knew or reflected that the heaven they were going to was a place where discontent, disturbance and tumult were not altogether unknown.

Be this as it may, the royal judge now proceeds to address the array upon his left, and, as in the preceding case, gives his sentence first and his reasons afterwards.

There is one thing, at any rate, that we like about this atrocious verse. There is no beating about the bush; it is straight to the point. And it is a relief to find no professions or pretensions of sorrow, regret, or sympathy professed; no allegation that the frightful deed is painful, but must be carried out. Celestial cant is at least as bad as, if not worse than, the corresponding earthly article.

"Everlasting fire." "Depart from me," says the meek and lowly Jesus, the Christlike Nazarene, "ye cursed, into everlasting fire." We have but little to say regarding the adjective or the noun, original or translated, here set before us. Concerning the noun "fire," physical knowledge and analogy do not enable us to trace with any clearness what is or what can be here meant. It seems at first that anything or anyone put into a "furnace of fire" must be soon destroyed; that though the fire itself may be everlasting, anyone put therein must be speedily burnt up. But as it appears from what follows that the punishment in question is to be everlasting, it is clear that measures not known to us will be taken to

keep our suffering capacity permanently alive. The religious founders seldom took the trouble to think out the meanings of the terms they so glibly made use of; to which it may be added that they had not the requisite knowledge to speak accurately of many things they incautiously alluded to.

Upon the word "everlasting" countless dissertations have been written. Many of these remind us of dissertations on the drowned swine; for the object in both cases is the same, namely, to persuade us that words do not mean what they palpably do mean. Pathetic indeed is here the position of humane Christians. Struggling with their revolting feelings and consciences; sincerely loving their notions of their blessed Lord; resolutely unwilling to abate their theories of him; horrified at the natural meanings of much he said; debarred from the idea that he may have been misreported; and reduced to the misery of finding comfort in verbal niceties and subtleties of a very humbling kind — they are truly to be commiserated. Hardened Christians who are not troubled with humane promptings, or who have succeeded in extinguishing them, occupy a perfectly clear position on this subject; for they believe and maintain that their blessed Lord simply meant and means what he said.

"Prepared for the devil." It appears that the fire into which we are to be thrown was primarily prepared for Satan; presumably at the time of his ejection from heaven. The misfortune, however, so far as our human race is concerned is, that though this fire was specially prepared for Satan, he was not kept there. At the very outset, we may remember that he found his way into the garden of Eden; and in the time of Job he enjoyed such a degree of liberty that he attended meetings of the sons of God. And we have seen in this Gospel how he is free to go to the tops of exceeding high mountains, the tops of temples, and other most agreeable places. It is also the opinion of all the best theologians that he is now a free ranger over all our earth. No doubt John assures us that he will eventually, though not yet awhile, be cast into a "lake" of fire, the one doubtless here mentioned by the Master. But we own to a grave suspicion whether he can be kept there or not.

"And his angels." The devil's angels have been a subject of much speculation. Some think they were those demons whom Jesus and his disciples, the children of the Pharisees, and so many

others were so busy exorcising eighteen centuries ago. If so, they, like their master, were evidently left at large. But a much more probable opinion is that Satan's angels are the once heavenly angels who fell along with him. What made those glorious beings dissatisfied with paradise we shall probably never know. And it is better not to ponder upon the subject, which is eminently calculated to shake our conception of heavenly stability. The present habitat of these angels we also do not know; but their eventual fate is clear. Having once dwelt in paradise, their fate must be much worse than that of those of us who have not been there, and who have never known anything better than the very mixed conditions of earthly existence.

Having passed upon the left hand section of humanity the atrocious sentence just named, the king goes on to give the reason thereof—if the honoured word reason may be dishonoured by being used in such a connection. For heaven and earth and hell combined are not able to furnish a reason for such a sentence, or rather such a crime.

42 For I was an hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Using the same figure of speech as in the preceding case, the king tells this unhappy throng that he had been hungry and thirsty and they had given him no meat nor drink; had been a stranger and naked and they had not taken him in nor clothed him; he had been sick and in prison and they had not visited him.

We are very sceptical of the feasibility of sharply dividing mankind into two fundamentally opposite sections on the matter of these amiabilities as on other matters. We are convinced that these left hand folks had wrought in their time numerous kindnesses; and we are also convinced that amongst the right hand gathering there would be many whose achievements in this line would be very moderate. Such a bisecting line amongst men and women with a heaven and a hell following its track is a very puerile picture.

We will yield to no living being in our admiration of kindness and fellow feeling shown from man to man. And we devoutly wish that for those who are selfish, indifferent to the sorrows and privations of their fellows, who alleviate no troubles, assuage no pains, and live ignobly for themselves alone, there may be in store a just and righteous penalty. If mankind are to appear before a

really just judge these neglected claims will be properly dealt with. But to cast men for such, or for any possible acts, into everlasting fire is a proceeding that simply raises our execration, so far as such a picture is able to stir any feeling of any kind. For the picture of a being inculcating humanity, charity, fellow feeling, and tender heartedness under the threat of inflicting everlasting torture is a picture that absolutely stultifies itself. Its effect upon us is precisely that of a contradiction in terms. A being capable of such a deed is capable of anything. A "heavenly father" capable of punishing the worst human being that ever breathed, not for eternity but for an odd thousand years, would himself be a criminal ten thousand times blacker than his worst victim.

How it will fare with Christians who have not much exercised these obvious virtues and with non-Christians who have, it is, we fear, vain to speculate. As we have just remarked, these virtues, not only in the forms here named but in many other and better ways also, are being daily exercised by many, though not for the Prophet of Nazareth's sake. These virtues too are the world over being exercised for other paradises and other sakes than his. And what is better still, far better still, good men are now everywhere striving to make the sorrows here named less and less possible. To secure better industrial arrangements and a juster distribution of wealth is far better than to have to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. An improved sanitary measure is of more value than much visiting of the sick; and juvenile education more effective than much prison-visiting. With regard to the pleasant and fascinating virtue of hospitality, we greatly fear that for a long time to come, the taking in of strangers will need a good deal of discretion on the part of those concerned.

It is to be observed that the judgment set before us in this verse is based entirely and solely upon sins of omission. Positive evil deeds of any kind are not alluded to; and in the case of both sections, religious belief of any kind is entirely unmentioned.

None of the chief religious founders, as we have remarked, took the trouble to be even moderately consistent; and on this head the Prophet of Nazareth took less trouble than most others even. The countless warring sects of his faith proclaim the amazing elasticity of his doctrinal declarations; and in our humble judgment, every variety of Christian, from the Quaker to the Jesuit, is an authentic

follower of the Master. On the grave subject before us Jesus was conspicuously pliant; and every view, from that of the steeled predestinarian to that of the creamiest universalist, may find its apparent warrant. How it is by our words we are to be justified and condemned we have already seen. How faith is the sole means of salvation, and how vain good works and all other pleas will be, is perhaps the chief burden of the Gospel generally. How instantaneously too this latter quality of faith operates, is shown in the case of the thief who, two or three days after this, obtained paradise by an hour's belief; a case where works of mercy must have been peculiarly scanty. But of the various determinant causes and recipes for entry into paradise and pandemonium we certainly like the ones here assigned best; they are at any rate, the least unsatisfactory.

As in the case of the happy ones, so here also. These doomed ones, not comprehending the hyperbole, and what is more surprising, not being stunned and dumbfounded by the cruel sentence they had just heard passed upon them, ask the judge when the event or events he had referred to occurred. Possibly the notion of this king being sick, naked, and in prison, led these unhappy ones to entertain a hope that their sentence must surely be a corresponding trope.

By way of answer, the same explanation in substance is given as in the other instance. In this case indeed "these" are not termed "my brethren." Who "these" were; the possibility of the interchange of good offices between the heirs and non-heirs of salvation, and other queer points are here raised, but we shall make no attempt to elucidate them.

A great and righteous day of judgment, in which all men would be justly dealt with, adequately punished for sins and misdeeds, and rewarded for good deeds and worthy suffering, is a noble vision, to which every good man would say with his whole heart, Amen.

Which of us would not even rejoice to have our own sins duly punished as part of a grand and universal retribution? Who can think of the history of our world, and not wish to see the great past, with all its deeds and misdeeds, brought to bar, and the wrongs of all the ages made right?

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

Who can help feeling, even in these later and happier days, when enlightenment has destroyed so many of the scourges and flagrancies of the past, how imperfect still is the justice meted out to men—and we will add, deride us who may—to other sentient things also? Are we not still surrounded with wealth and want; with idlers and worn toilers; with wrong-doers and patient sufferers; and with other forms of wrong too many to be named? And though in those fairer and better ages to which we are slowly but surely moving on, many of these injustices of man to man will have lessened and many disappeared, who can help fearing that many wrongs inaccessible to human justice will still remain?

And there will always remain the gross and the exquisite iniquities of Nature herself; the strong and the weak; the healthy and the afflicted; the fortunate, who escape the thousand and one forms of natural calamity which surround us—from the death or crushed limb of an individual foot-slip up to the devastations of the tempest and the earthquake—and the unfortunate who meet with one and sometimes many of these dire workings of the uncaring and inflexible processes of Nature.

Such a day of righteous judgment, such a rectification of earthly things in a life after death, has ever been a favourite vision with mankind. Long before Jesus was born the idea of the recompense of our earthly actions in a world to come had been propounded and pictured in an immense variety of ways. The Greeks and the Romans pourtrayed the idea in many ways, both pleasing and unpleasing. The Eastern nations pictured the notion in a multitude of ways, sometimes agreeable but usually fantastic. It was found existing in the New World. Even the humbler and more elementary types of our species, to whom we give the harsh title of savages, have been as a rule not without their own grotesque ideas on the subject. For in another aspect of the question, the idea of a life after death and of our being overhauled therein for things done here is a very obvious device; it has been brought to bear on behalf of all sorts of things, good and bad; it has proved a potent instrument of persuasion and of terrorism the world over; and, as generally made use of, it has been upon the whole an engine of great mischief as well as of salutary restraint.

The idea of a just retribution in a life after death has, too, more especially in past times, been much praised by many thinkers and philosophers, including many who have had no faith in it as an

objective reality. The efficacy of such a belief as an encourager of good and a deterrent from evil has been much dwelt upon; for a spiritual police has an advantage, which cannot possibly be ascribed to the earthly ones, of being perfectly cognizant of all the improper acts and thoughts of men.

It is extremely curious that the Jews had little or nothing of the belief in question. The Old Testament has scarcely an allusion to or a trace of a life after death, and is entirely devoid of any system of post-mortem rewards and punishments. We are told it was Jesus who brought life and immortality to light. It is true he brought his own special version of those things to light; and a sorrowful one it is.

But whilst all good men may say Amen to the vision of a great day of righteous judgment, we may all exclaim, God forbid! to one and all of the horrible travesties of such a day of judgment laid before us by religious founders. Better, far better, that all the wrongs our earth ever witnessed should remain for ever unredressed, than that any one of the revolting scenes pictured by those personages as judgment days should be ever realized.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

MATTHEW XXVI.

WE have now practically reached the end of the utterances and teachings of the Prophet of Nazareth. The three remaining chapters of the narrative contain a few incidental sayings of his, but are in the main a description of his persecution by the Jews, his arrest, trial, and martyrdom; to which is added an account of his resurrection from the dead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

1 *The rulers conspire against Christ.* 6 *The woman anointeth his head.* 14 *Judas selleth him.* 17 *Christ eateth the passover:* 26 *instituteth his holy supper:* 36 *prayeth in the garden:* 47 *and being betrayed with a kiss,* 57 *is carried to Caiaphas,* 69 *and denied of Peter.*

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,

It is, we think, not possible for a humane man to read the records of the persecutions and the martyrdoms with which human history so abounds, without feelings of great sympathy

with the sufferers therefrom. No doubt our sympathy or non-sympathy with the cause and object of the martyr may greatly affect and colour this feeling. Still our common sentiment of humanity, the touch of nature which makes us all kin, breaks

through the strongest likes and dislikes; and we read the accounts of the sufferings and deaths of the varied martyrs, whether for or against us, with a common, if not equal, regret and pity.

The religions have, of course, been the great, the fertile, and the pre-eminent cause of these sorrowful histories. But outside the religions, who can read the narratives of the deaths of the various political martyrs, of the brave men who perished even to resist reforms as well as of those who died to achieve them, without a common, if unequal, sympathy? He must be a very morbid patriot who cannot appreciate those who nobly died against his country as well as those who died for it. And in these later days of broadened sympathies and softened antipathies, when many of the feelings that once sharply sundered and embittered men have become extinct or exist in milder and more charitable forms alone, men are now able to look back upon history with calmness and with fairness. And so looking, we see how conscientious, and therefore deserving of respect, have been the men who have laid down their lives for all the varied religions and patriotisms of the world. The definition of the word martyr found in some of the older dictionaries, "one who died for the truth," needs but the adding of the words "to him," to make it perfectly accurate.

It is therefore, Reader, with unfeigned sincerity we can say, that though entirely unable to think of Jesus of Nazareth as Christians think of him; unable to discern in what he said to mankind any of those amazing qualities Christians see therein; compelled to dissent from much he said, and to absolutely detest not a little, we yet read this account of his persecution and death with sorrow and regret, as great as that felt by Christians themselves.

The ordinary Christian theory that this apparently sad event was in reality a joyful boon to our race is indeed one which we can share and enter into in no single aspect; and we deeply regret that Jesus was put to death at all. The view too that that event was compulsory, was written in the book of fate, and that there was no conceivable or possible escape from its enforcement is addressed to us in vain. And it is no small relief to be free from the painful doctrine that Jesus foresaw the appalling series of martyrdoms of which his own was destined to be the source.

After ending "all these sayings," including doubtless many

Ye know that after
two days is *the feast of*

besides those our author has just recorded,
Jesus reminded the disciples that two days

the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.

hence was the Passover, and that he was to be betrayed to be crucified. The former fact was, of course, well known to the disciples; and Jesus had so often apprised them of the latter that the reminder, though painful, could occasion them no surprise. No answer of the disciples is given. The reply given by Jesus to Peter's sympathetic deprecation of such a fate was not calculated to encourage further expressions of a like kind. This verse has altogether an unconnected, fragmentary look.

With this verse begins an account of the proceedings and the judicial processes which eventuated in the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus. It is not a lucid narrative. And when it is collated with the accounts found in the other Gospels, especially the fourth, it is difficult, if not impossible, to form from such a collation any coherent or consistent mental picture. The difficulties of this final portion of the joint Gospel record—until we reach the resurrection—are certainly not of the kind presented to us by its first portion. The various accounts of the processes which led to Jesus' death are somewhat confusing; but they do not furnish us with a difficulty of the two genealogies sort, or of the flight into Egypt and presentation in the temple character.

In contemplating this concluding part of the Gospel history, we propose to practically confine ourselves to the account furnished by this first Gospel. The system of continual reference to and comparison with the other Gospels is a weariness of the flesh; and we shall resort to the accounts of these latter events given by the other evangelists in a few special instances only.

The present verse somewhat abruptly apprises us that a conclave of the chief priests, scribes, and elders, was now assembled at the palace of the high priest Caiaphas, for the purpose of suppressing Jesus and his cause. Whether this gathering was assembled for that special purpose only, or it was a meeting for other and general purposes in which the putting down of Jesus and Christianity arose, has been much discussed but not determined.

It thus appears that the movement which brought about the death of Jesus originated with the chief priests, scribes, and elders—the priestly, official, and so-called upper classes; the same classes who, with honourable but rare exceptions, have proved themselves

3 Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas.

in every country and in every age, the steady and bitter enemies of every innovation, however beneficent, and the servile and often cruel instruments and upholders of current beliefs, however false, and existing evils, however gross.

The attitude of the people generally towards Jesus is very difficult to gather. It appears in this and the next chapter as not simply ambiguous, but as totally contradictory. Jesus had just been hosannahed into the city; and when these same priests had desired before this to lay hands upon him, we read that they feared the people who took him for a prophet. And here, as we see, this assembly feared an uproar amongst the people if Jesus were arrested at the time of the feast, thus seeming to imply that he was a favourite with the people, or with a large section, and that it was somewhat dangerous to molest him.

Directly afterwards, however, we find the people preferring the release of another notability of the day to the release of Jesus; and clamouring even for the latter's crucifixion. His blood be on us, answered "all the people." The fickleness of personal popularity is certainly proverbial, but the cause assigned by our author for this rapid veering round of popular feeling in the course of a few days from admiration to extreme antipathy—that the chief priests "persuaded the multitude"—seems very inadequate. Nor does any other visible cause suggest itself for so sudden a change in the popular estimation of Jesus. Some indeed suggest that Jesus disappointed popular expectation in not redeeming or attempting to redeem Israel. If this were so, why does our author not state this, but allege priestly instigation instead?

The very evident truth, Reader, is that Jesus created but a very small commotion whilst he was on earth; that he was but a very modest figure to his contemporaries, as those who have afterwards greatly influenced men have often been. The curt notice, if it be his, of the great Jewish historian who has given us such a detailed narrative of the Jewish history of this period, and the silence of contemporary writers show us what a small general impression the Second Person of the Trinity had made whilst in the world. His fame may have gone over "all Syria"; but there are no traces of it save in these Gospels.

For a long time, too, after Jesus' death, the notices of Christianity and its founder in the writings of the time are slighting ones; not the assumed deridings of men who really thought the new faith a

serious thing, but the deridings of men who palpably considered it as not meriting anything else.

The purpose of this assembly in the palace of Caiaphas was, as that of assemblies of a like kind in other priestly palaces has so often been, not to inquire and investigate, but to condemn. Of a truth, Reader, this was a strange assembly.

4 And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.

The chief priests of the living Jehovah were gathered to consult how they might take the only "begotten" son of Jehovah by subtlety and kill him. The men who composed this council were men trained and steeped in the study of those scriptures and prophecies which, according to Christian priests and scribes and elders, so clearly point out that this same Jesus was the Messiah. So little did the men of this council share such a view—and many of them, as we see, had seen and talked with Jesus—that they regarded him as a blasphemer and sought to kill him.

Fairness compels us to own that Jesus' attitude and methods with these men had not been such as to conduce to any conciliatory spirit or kindly disposed frame of mind on their part. When men are termed hypocrites, vipers, children of the devil, and whited sepulchres, it is hardly in human nature to feel amiable; and such methods of accosting could hardly seem in themselves very Messianic.

The proceedings of this curious assembly would have made a highly interesting record. Judaism and Christianity were here in contact under strange circumstances. It cannot be supposed that the latter was calmly discussed and investigated. The manifest assumption was that the new doctrine was a pernicious innovation, which it was a plain duty to suppress. What were the measures of "subtilty" thus discussed it is vain to conjecture. It is possible, though scarcely probable, that overtures from the renegade apostle were received or entertained at this meeting.

The theory of inspiration seems the only method of accounting for our author's knowledge of what transpired at this assembly; discussions of "subtilty" not being likely to be disclosed by such a body.

5 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

The crowded state of the city would certainly render any step on which popular opinion might be divided not a timely one. But as we shall see, this consideration did not avail to postpone the arrest of Jesus. An uproar among the people was hazarded.

Scarcely is this grave narrative begun when it is interrupted to record an incident of a very minor kind ; and an incident having no perceivable bearing upon the main subject in hand. It is an occurrence of a purely personal kind, involving no point of a moral or doctrinal order ; and is considered by most commentators a very telling and pathetic anecdote. Many authorities consider this incident not here recorded in its proper place ; a comparison with the accounts of the occurrence found in the other Gospels raising very characteristic, and in this instance very accentuated, "difficulties" in the way of the peculiar science known as the "harmony of the Gospels."

Jesus was sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper in the village of Bethany. Of Simon himself this is all the knowledge we possess ; but we cannot surely be wrong in taking him at this time to have been a whilom leper only, for who can think Jesus would leave such an ailment upon one in whose house he sat down to take a meal ? For some time past, however, miracles have been in abeyance, and remain so until we come to what may be called the terminal ones.

Whilst Jesus was thus pleasantly honouring the house and the hospitality of Simon—how agreeable it is to think of the Creator of our world and of the Milky Way thus sat at meat in this village—a woman came to him, and out of an alabaster box poured upon the head of Jesus a quantity of very precious ointment. Who this woman was, and her immediate purpose in the act, are not here stated ; the motive ascribed to her by Jesus being probably a figurative application of the incident merely. She is herself silent. But the act was clearly one of affectionate admiration ; and unless a woman of means an act of some little sacrifice also according to the computed value of the ointment given elsewhere.

This was not the first time Jesus had met with this experience. In the early part of his career, whilst in Galilee, we read in the third Gospel that "a woman in the city which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears and wipe them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet and anointed

6 ¶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper.

7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.

them with ointment." The name of this Pharisee was Simon also.

From what we find in the fourth Gospel, it would almost seem that the case here laid before us was even the third time this curious event had befallen Jesus. For in the fourth Gospel we read that "Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

Though some authorities consider all these incidents one and the same, most learned scholars hold that the Galilee case was a separate one, but that the one given in the fourth Gospel and the one now before us were identical. In a matter of this kind it is better to let ourselves be guided by the greater consensus of experts; more especially as some remarkably ingenious, if not convincing, reasons are suggested to us why the Lazarus and his two sisters, who figure so greatly in the last Gospel, are left out of the other three.

Upon the act of this woman or these women has been bestowed much pious literature, not to speak of homilies and sermons. An act of Jesus' own could scarcely have called forth higher panegyric and more highly-pitched sentiment than those awarded to and evoked by these exhibitions of feminine tenderness and faith. To impugn, or even to seek to moderate, such an array of pious eulogy seems a rash as well as an unfeeling task; little likely to result in anything but getting oneself declared destitute of any of the fine feelings. The strange glamour cast by piety over everything appertaining to an object of devotion is a curious phenomenon, seen in faiths of all kinds; and is much deplored and pitied when witnessed in faiths not ours. It is only in the case of a prophet's feet that a woman's bathing them with her tears, and then wiping them with the hair of her head, would be regarded as becoming or pleasant to think of.

In the fourth Gospel there is a curious act done by Jesus himself recorded, which the present story calls to mind. Jesus, we there read, washed the whole of the twelve disciples' feet, including apparently those even of Iscariot; and commanded the disciples to

wash one another's feet. Upon this act have also been bestowed the most glowing praises.

To wash the feet, nay, to minister even in a still more humble way to the wants of a sick or helpless one, is a thing full of true tenderness and true dignity. But for one healthy man to wash the feet of another healthy man is, in our humble judgment, destitute of both. The chief of Christendom still performs this act once a year—a suggestively long interval; but he is, we believe, almost the only Christian who now carries out the master's orders and example on this point.

It appears that the disciples were also in Simon's house at the time of this occurrence, and on observing the

8 But when his disciples saw *it*, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?

9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

woman's action they were indignant; the special point of their indignation being the waste thus made. "To what purpose is this waste?"

they ask, presumably of the woman herself. As a general proposition these disciples were quite right, and took a very sensible view of

the act. Pouring ointment upon a person's head serves no useful purpose; is, indeed, an inherently unpleasant thing. That it would have been better had this box of ointment been sold for much and the proceeds given to the poor, if deserving poor, is a contention not easily overcome.

Mary—taking this case to be the one given in the last Gospel—remained silent, leaving a reply to, or being anticipated by, her much loved Lord. Her sister Martha, though in Simon's house, was busy serving. Lazarus, who had been dead for a period of four days, was also present. He was a quiet, retiring man. How eagerly we look for him in the remaining events of this narrative and in early Christian history. Alas! how keenly we miss him!

But it is possible to be untimely and infelicitous even in the practice of a virtue. Jesus had just reminded

10 When Jesus understood *it*, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.

11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did *it* for my burial.

these disciples that he was about to be crucified; and though it is true they also knew he was to rise again and come back to them on the third day afterwards, still criticism of an act of deference and devotion, such as that just offered by this woman to their master, was ill-timed at such a juncture.

On learning, therefore, what the disciples

had said, Jesus replied to them, "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me." And as regards the poor, Jesus reminds them that the poor are always at hand; whereas he was about to leave them.

He further adds that the woman had poured this ointment upon his body for his burial; which, assuming that the woman—as, if Mary, was not unlikely—had the knowledge possessed by the disciples of impending events, may possibly be taken as a literal statement of her intentions, but which in all probability is merely a figurative application of the occurrence.

The incident is brought to a close by Jesus declaring with a pleasing warmth that wheresoever the Gospel is preached in all the world this woman's act shall also be recorded for a "memorial of her"; a prediction that has been entirely verified. It is true such a prophecy, being a contingent one, is of a self-fulfilling nature. Still, a clear prophecy is such a rarity that there is a positive pleasure in seeing such a one fulfilled.

It is curious to note what little things have, even in secular history, served to immortalize. Many little items and incidents that took place even more than eighteen centuries ago are still agreeably remembered and read of.

Painful indeed, Reader, is the subject now brought before us. In the early part of this Gospel, when the calling and enumeration of the twelve were given, the calling of Judas felt to be a thing from which the mind shrank back in dismay.

14 ¶ Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,

That amongst the twelve apostles there should prove to be a traitor is, from a natural standpoint, quite intelligible. In bodies of men, religious and non-religious alike, treachery is unhappily no very uncommon or startling fact. But that one of the twelve should be a traitor and, by hypothesis, be known by Jesus to be so from the very beginning and yet be deliberately chosen, is a theory from which the human mind recoils.

According to the fourth Gospel Jesus made known this miserable fact very early. "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" is a statement which that Gospel assures us Jesus made in Capernaum almost at the outset. Whether Jesus then specified Judas as the disciple in question the Johannine Gospel leaves in

ambiguity ; the phrase used being open to opposite conclusions. If Jesus then pointed out the traitor, it is 'inconceivable how his colleagues could possibly tolerate his society. If Jesus did not so specify Judas, he must have diffused a miserable suspicion and distrust amongst the whole twelve.

The other Gospels give us the impression that the traitor became such at the end only, the other disciples being in happy ignorance of the fact and of the culprit until, in answer to their anxious inquiries, "Is it I?" Jesus disclosed the truth to them, as shown a little further on in this very chapter.

The third Gospel expressly states that it was at the very juncture here dealt with by our author that "Satan entered into Judas"; after which it is obvious that the proceedings of Judas were simply the proceedings of the great ex-Archangel himself. The fact that Judas had received the power to heal the sick, cast out devils, and raise the dead, and the fact that he received the promise to sit upon a throne and judge a tribe of Israel, show us that up to this time he had in no way been discriminated from the other apostles. According to the fourth Gospel he was even then a "devil."

We will dwell upon this intensely repellent subject no longer, save to remark that a traitor was a sheer superfluity. For apart altogether from the transcendental theory that Jesus came to our planet wishing to be, and intending to be, put to death, his arrest was a step which needed no treachery, either apostolic or other, in order to be compassed.

Judas, or more properly Satan in that disguise, went, it appears, to the chief priests of Jehovah, and inquired what they would pay for the delivering up of Jesus to them. The sum agreed to be paid by these chief priests of Jehovah was thirty pieces of silver; a trifling bribe disagreeable to contemplate from any standpoint. As regards these priests the sum was contemptuous; as regards Judas, unintelligibly paltry; as regards Satan, a piece of odious jeering.

15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

It appears, however, from what our author states later on, that this particular sum had really been fixed and decreed by heaven and written down by the prophet Jeremy ages ago. We thus see how purely nominal the apparent parties to this bargain really were. It is very singular to think that Satan, who knew Scripture well,

should thus be a party to fulfilling Jeremy's prophecy. Was it possible for him to have insisted upon forty pieces? or accepted twenty? Satan's assisting to carry out the Christian "scheme" at all is entirely unintelligible.

Regarding for a moment these chief priests of Jehovah as free agents, a very old question in honour and morals is raised by their action, namely, how far knowledge tendered by informers, spies, and traitors may be availed of. In peace and in war, in daily life, and in the administration of justice even, forms of this dilemma often present themselves. Probably the question will ever remain amongst the controverted ones; but if such a method of obtaining knowledge be ever justifiable, it is never otherwise than hateful.

The opportunity of fulfilling his bargain, which our author tells us Judas from this time sought, he had not, as we shall see, long to wait for. An interview between the chief priests of the living God and Satan in the outward form of Judas, for the purpose of making arrangements for the delivering up of the Second Person of the Trinity, is a call upon our faith surely sufficient for all reasonable testing and trying purposes.

Those who may wish to know or refresh their memories as to what a "Passover" was, will find in the Book of Exodus the original description of that ceremony; and those not quite satisfied with what is there given may find in Jewish literature, and in the works of our own theologians, much elucidatory assistance.

17 ¶ Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

It will suffice for our purpose to remember that for a Passover each householder had to procure a male lamb, which was to be without blemish; a preliminary requisite which, if interpreted very strictly, would cause householders no little trouble. After being kept four days these young rams were taken to the court of the temple and there slain in the evening. Their blood was sprinkled on the altar, and their bones kept carefully whole. This being done, the flesh of these young rams was taken home and eaten the same night by the respective households, or by an amalgamation thereof if needful; the companies thus eating the Passover being not more than twenty or under ten in number.

Very careful instructions are given in Exodus as to eating these lambs. They were not to be eaten raw, nor sodden with water,

“but roast with fire.” Any remnants left from the repast had to be carefully burnt.

Along with the meat of these lambs unleavened bread and bitter herbs were to be eaten; a cup of wine and water serving for a drink. If the injunctions of Exodus were strictly complied with, the people partaking of a Passover were to have the loins girded, shoes on the feet, and a staff in the hand; and the Passover was to be eaten in haste.

At this particular time, and at the corresponding period of every year, Jerusalem was crowded with faithful Israelites from all parts come up to the holy city to comply with this pious and elegant ceremony. The feast indeed extended over a week, and was characterized by an abundance of other rites and practices not needful here to refer to.

Jesus, as we have seen throughout, carefully complied with Jewish ceremonials. Hence the disciples come to ask him where he will eat the Passover, and thus enable them to make ready for it.

The way in which—given in greater detail in the two next Gospels—the room requisite for the purpose was obtained, has a resemblance to the manner in which the animal or animals upon which Jesus entered Jerusalem were acquired. There is in both cases the same kind of clairvoyance, of assumption of right, and of undemurring acquiescence of those concerned. Many think the name of this householder was known to the four evangelists, but kept undisclosed for prudential reasons of a worldly kind—a singularly tame supposition in such a connection.

The preparations for eating a Passover would require, as we have seen, some considerable time and trouble on the part of the disciples, if we exclude supernatural agency. However, “they made ready the Passover,” and when the authorized time of even was come, Jesus and the twelve sat down to it. It seems clear that the thirteen were the only ones present, the householder himself being apparently not admitted.

Whilst this Passover, consisting as we have seen of wine, bread, and roasted lamb, was being partaken, Jesus disclosed the fact that there was a traitor

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them: and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say

unto you, that one of you shall betray me,

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

amongst the company. A more painful thing to divulge, and on such an occasion too, it is impossible to conceive. According to this Gospel, this would be news to the eleven as startling as it was sorrowful; but according to the

fourth, it was a fact they had long known.

If human reasonings had any validity as applied to celestial acts, it would be impossible to refrain wondering why Judas was admitted to this Passover. And as regards Judas himself, his voluntary presence thereat is inexplicable. It is true his colleagues did not yet know the bargain he had made with the chief priests; but was not Judas aware that the Master knew it, as he knew all things? Finally, when we remember who it was that had entered into and was wielding Judas, such a presence at this Passover becomes well nigh intolerable.

So little did the disciples know the real culprit that each asked Jesus, "Is it I?" In ordinary and natural circumstances one's own self-consciousness would render such a question needless. No doubt "shall betray" is, strictly speaking, future, and to fall from grace is possible with the best; but Jesus was clearly speaking of a present state of mind, of an actual traitor.

To these anxious inquiries Jesus made the response here given, the real meaning of which it is not possible to feel certain of. Some take it as a re-enunciation of the general statement that a seeming friend was to be the betrayer; others think the fingers of Jesus and those of Iscariot had just been dipped in the self-same dish, and that thus these words were a specific pointing out of the traitor.

Jesus goes on to declare that the Son of man goeth as it is written of him. "As it is written," given as the obligation to a melancholy deed by the very person who himself caused it to be thus written, is surely a very pointless kind of thing. If men are not to have the inscrutable reasons of things made known to them by heaven—

good and well. But if reasons have to be offered to us at all they should be the real ones. The reason why it was thus written is the one needed, if any be needed.

To this Jesus adds the exclamation, "woe unto that man by

23 And he answered and said, He that dipeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

whom the Son of man is betrayed ! it had been good for that man if he had not been born." To us, Reader, it seems that it would have been good for the world also if this individual had never been born. And yet, on the wretched theory that "offences must come," the requisite tools and instruments to effect the offences in question must obviously be called into being.

Some consider this a portentous and impressive condemnation of Judas. Vagueness is the only factor of those qualities we are able to discover in it. Of many besides Judas may it truly be said that it had been good if they had not been born. If the Christian or any other religion be true, it would have been good for the vast bulk of men if they had not been born.

The two-fold truth that good for themselves and good for the world if they had never existed may be said of many human beings. The full and happy converse of well for themselves and well for others may, we believe, be said in varying degree of the lives of most men. And of not a few whose own lives were not happy may it justly be said that they rendered noble service to the world.

If we were free to regard Judas from a natural standpoint, his coolness and effrontery would raise our strongest aversion. But the theory of devil-possession, as we have elsewhere remarked, seems to render it impossible to regard a human being in that condition as in any way capable of normal contemplation. The mighty potentate who had possessed himself of Judas and was thus present at this Passover, and who, according to the fourth Gospel, took possession of Judas at this very Passover meal, was a being of whose courage or presumption we have already seen some colossal illustrations at the beginning of this Gospel record. To that source seem clearly to be ascribed this self-possession and impudence of the ex-apostle.

To the inquiry of Judas, Jesus made answer, "Thou hast said." This phrase is one that we shall find that Jesus makes use of also in replying to questions put to him by the high priest and by Pilate. It is apparently meant as a reply in the affirmative ; but it has not, as we shall see in other cases more especially, the clear confirmatory effect of a more simple rejoinder.

Our author does not tell us if Judas still remained with the company. The point has been much debated ; to no purpose, of course. Hypothetical history is a profitless exercise. Many pious

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

folks who have had to endure the presence of Judas at this Passover up to this point are very anxious to think of him as absent from what follows. This view is mostly found in later works. Speaking, Reader, of the whole Gospel history, a comparison of the older with the later commentators and theologians strikingly reveals, amidst much to the advantage of the later ones in other respects, how much more delicate and how much less robust and thoroughgoing is the faith current in these later times.

Let us hope Judas did at this time take his departure. Many were the Passovers that were at this same time being eaten elsewhere in Jerusalem; and many black sheep and many unpleasantnesses were, we may safely say, present and took place thereat. But safely also may we say, that at none did anything so truly painful occur as took place in the upper room of the house of the man with the pitcher.

Around the simple incident and the simple words here recorded

26 ¶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

there has for centuries raged in Christendom a storm of controversy, which has now abated, not because the controversy has been settled and determined, but because it is now regarded as hopelessly incapable of being settled, and because men have now almost entirely lost the taste for such disputations.

Unsettled as ever still remains this famous conflict, however; as unreconciled as ever, though greatly subdued, are the rival views and contentions regarding what we here read. Indeed, unlike other controverted subjects, religious disputes are incapable of settlement, except settlement by exhaustion. There is nothing discoverable by man that can bring theological disputes to an issue and an end. The sword and the civil power have often attempted the task, but with transient success only.

As to heaven itself, it has ever shown, and still shows, towards these unhappy religious strifes and their deplorable consequences a lamentable neutrality or indifference; and not as regards the Christian only, but as regards all other faiths, both older and newer, also. Heaven's unexerted power to clear up to us, not only this, but all religious rivalries, is manifest; and its power, better still, to have prevented them is equally patent. When Jesus used the words now before us, he, by hypothesis, well knew the rival interpreta-

tions that would be placed upon them, and all the lamentable consequences arising therefrom. But, as with the other grave things that have shattered the household of faith, the preventive words were left unspoken.

If, Reader, we could bring together the total effects that have resulted from the disputed meanings of this little passage; if we could estimate the time and effort bestowed to explain it; if we could fully assess the contest and conflict it has engendered; if we could compute the total quarrels and calamities, the enmities and alienations it has given birth to; if we could measure the personal and social consequences, and even the political effects, that have ensued from the controversy upon this passage, it would be enough to make us stand aghast at the amazing consequences of an ambiguous expression.

“And as they were eating.” The act of Jesus as here related gives the impression of being unpremeditated, if such a term be applicable to supposed omniscience. The company were partaking of a meal, and Jesus passed round to each first bread and then a cup of wine, first blessed and probably first tasted by himself. The ordinary practice at a Passover was to pass the cup round three times. To outsiders like ourselves, the whole act appears nothing more than a very ordinary and very natural expression of friendship and intimacy. Jesus, however, in his customary manner, proceeds to give this little act a prodigious, or prodigiously figurative, signification.

“Take, eat; this is my body.” Literal or figurative; which is it? It would ill become us to meddle in such a matter. As we look at the very words themselves, a whole array of well-known phrases seems to surround them; an array sufficient to fright away any thought of attempted exegesis. The words Eucharist, Lord’s Supper, the Mass, Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, not to mention a host of minor metaphysical subtleties and inanities bearing various names, and amiably suggested as ingenious compromises, seem to flit and hover around these words of Jesus, and are enough to deter and drive away the most confident.

According to the last Gospel Jesus had early declared to the Jews that “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you.” And the Jews asked, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” thus showing that the difficulty which has so troubled Christendom, was beyond the

comprehension even of Israel. And we frankly own, Reader, that to us such imagery, taken figuratively, is only a very small degree less gross and unpleasant than taken literally.

One very practical lesson of this famous controversy is to show us how futile is the application of the laws of human reasoning to the non-natural, either for the purpose of confirmation or of refutation. Anti-literalists on this subject ask how Jesus could give his own body whilst still himself animating it; point out that analysis shows the bread and wine used for the purpose now to be bread and wine after the blessing just as before; that a day's consumption of such elements would make and require many bodies the dimensions of that of Jesus; that the idea of literally eating the flesh of Jesus is gross and disrespectful; and then think such idle rationalisms ought to convince. They forget that the rising superior to reason and the things of sense is the very essence and charm of all the religious emotions. And they forget that the maxim of Jesus, that with himself nothing is impossible, covers all such objections; and, once and for all, bids human reason, as such, final defiance.

And it is not a little instructive to find those who champion human reasoning and its validity, as applied here and in some other debated matters, are often the most vigorous resisters of its validity as applied to their own favourite deridings of it. Outside Christianity altogether, anyone who will try ratiocination upon even the wildest vagaries of other religious faiths, will soon find how entirely non-operative the process is.

It may be remarked that the difficulty here confronting believers is no isolated instance, but an eminently characteristic and all-pervading one in these Gospels. Whether things are to be taken literally or otherwise is a constant problem in these Gospels, and one that affects almost the entire contents from the very matter-of-fact looking injunctions given on the mountain up to the many grave and most perplexingly confusing statements bearing upon the deity of the Prophet of Nazareth himself. No doubt this latter supreme problem, after much doubt, was determined fifteen centuries ago, and a well-known creed drawn up to finally end all misgivings. As we know but too well, these misgivings even on that prime subject still exist; and to an outside student of these Gospels the well-known and apparently most conclusive texts on both sides of that famous controversy still seem to beam with a convincing radiance.

The simple truth is, that figures of speech seem to have been to the Prophet of Nazareth not only a favourite vehicle of communication, but his habitual one. His well-known answer to his own question, "Who is my mother?" shows us there was no subject he excluded from metaphorical treatment. The parables which form so large a portion of the Gospel matter, and which were used for more than one purpose, are but a minor exemplification of this tendency. Hyperboles, metaphors, tropes, and similes meet us in every page and in every paragraph—nay, in some parts in every sentence of this Gospel narrative, and are the weariness and the dismay of an ordinary Gospel reader.

Our own aversion to figures of speech and everything of the nature of them we have already honestly confessed; and we rejoice greatly that in these modern ages they have been banished from every sphere but their own proper one of poetry. No doubt to some natures accuracy and exactitude feel cold and tame compared with imagery and symbolism. But happily, men generally have come to recognize the shallowness of the latter, not less than the quiet grandeur of the former. We doubt if any single factor has conduced more to human progress than the banishment of every species of allegorism and the substitution of plain speech.

Jesus repeated what he had said of the bread of the wine also. He declared it to be his blood shed for many for the remission of sins; and bade his disciples drink of it. The shedding of blood as a propitiation of a deity is an idea that pervades the Jewish scriptures, and was carried out in Jewish ritual in a variety of odious ways. Christians assure us that the immolation of Jesus was the final shedding of blood. It is a relief to know this, though the system of sacrifice was one that would have been best left uncompleted in the sense of unadded to. It is melancholy to reflect that that fearful system even yet exists. In the darker recesses of our earth propitiatory slaughter, both animal and human, still continues, and humbles us and our views of our species as we think of it.

This very difficult verse has greatly exercised Scripture expositors. Which of several possible meanings is the proper one is a frequent, indeed a perennial, problem with Gospel commentators; but here the problem is to suggest any distinct meaning of any sort. The day when Jesus will drink new wine with the apostles in his

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Father's kingdom is a formidable perplexity, however handled. Some think the fact that Jesus ate and drank after his resurrection is the solution of this difficulty; others apply to this new fruit of the vine the familiar process of spiritual evaporation.

"And when they had sung an hymn." The Psalms 113 to 118 were always sung at a Passover, and were known as the Passover psalms from that circumstance. There can be no doubt that they would also be the hymns or chants here sung by Jesus and the disciples; and which were simultaneously issuing from so many other rooms in Jerusalem.

The evening would be getting far spent when Jesus and his companions came down from this upper room into the street below. For it would seem, from what is recorded in the other Gospels, that the proceedings at this Passover meal must have extended over a very considerable time.

Though it does not fall within the strict scope of this work to do so, it may be permitted here just to summarize the additional information furnished in the other Gospels of what took place in this upper room, as some of it throws light upon what our author goes on to record, though furnishing also much knotty matter for the harmonist.

Luke tells us that after the passover had been partaken of there arose amongst the twelve a strife "which of them should be accounted the greatest." Such a scene at such a time is, to our thinking, little less painful to contemplate than the one which had occurred just previously. This indecent and unpleasant conduct Jesus reprimanded in the same words he had used when the dispute arose concerning the request made by John and James for the best seats in heaven; to which he in this case adds some further words of mixed reproach and praise.

Probably arising out of this unpleasant incident, Jesus addressed to Peter some very remarkable words. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." And according to Luke, Peter's bold reply and Jesus' prophecy of Peter's falseness before the next cock-crowing—given by our author as taking place outside—occurred in the room during the Passover.

What a narrow escape from falling into Satan's clutches Peter

30 And when they sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

had had is fully shown to us at the end of this very chapter; how perilously near to Peter the father of lies had been is only too well shown by those which fell from Peter's tongue. The prayers of Jesus however saved Peter from so dire a fate, though they did not save Peter's faith from failing, for a time at any rate. Is there anything wrong, Reader, in expressing a regret that the prayers of Jesus were not used to save another apostle from the sad fate from which they, and they alone, rescued Peter?

After this, Luke relates a highly curious dialogue between Jesus and the disciples which serves to explain an incident our author records. "When I sent you," said Jesus, "without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything"? And they said, "Nothing." Then said he unto them "But now he that hath a purse, let him take it and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one." . . . And they said, "Lord, behold here are two swords." And he said unto them, "It is enough."

This injunction to the apostles to procure swords, and thus apparently to prepare for resistance, is by some of the best Christian commentators frankly pronounced inexplicable; the verbal quibblings and spiritualizings offered by others are really too inane to detain anyone. Though, as we shall presently see, Jesus wished, temporarily at least, to escape his fate, it hardly seems possible to suppose he can have, even temporarily, entertained the thought or the wish to do so by means of a dozen human swords. Had such an end been permissible, not twelve legions of angels, but the odd destroying one who had smitten hosts in the past, would have effected the purpose with ease if summoned by Jesus to do so. However contemplated, this command of Jesus to obtain swords remains a blank difficulty.

It appears, however, that by some means or other two swords were actually present amongst the company, and commentators have excelled themselves in ingenious conjectures how they came there. That they belonged to the householder; that they were carried by Jesus and his apostles to "protect" themselves from robbers—what insipidities believers in the omnipotence of Jesus do tender us at times—or that two of the disciples at least were non-believers in passive submission and intended to resist, may be chosen from. If these swords were the householder's, two of the disciples borrowed them; and with one of them some slight execution was done by Peter.

In the fourth Gospel the proceedings at this Passover are greatly prolonged. Into the fundamental irreconcilabilities presented by that narrative it is not necessary to enter. Nor do its curious omissions, including even that of the institution of the Lord's Supper, here concern us. We need to note only the additional positive items it furnishes.

In that Gospel we read that Jesus arose from supper, laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself. He then poured water into a basin, washed the disciples' feet and wiped them with "the towel wherewith he was girded." This act was accompanied with a dialogue between Peter and his master and with a number of various sayings of Jesus himself.

After narrating, in a way quite peculiar to itself, the way in which the traitor was identified, that Gospel makes Jesus enjoin upon Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly"; a command that puzzled the disciples, but with which Judas seems to have at once complied by immediately going ont.

Following the departure of Judas, Jesus delivered a prodigiously long discourse or discourses which the fourth Gospel records and the mere utterance of which must have taken up no little time. Upon that discourse we are thankful it is no part of our project to comment. We may just observe that it is a mystic, dreamy, sentimental address, full of tedious repetitions and full of the most extraordinary statements; and that the admiration lavished by Christian pietists on these Johannine dissertations makes us cease to wonder at the rapture excited by their holy writs in believers of other creeds by showing us that the "eye of faith" can indeed irradiate the very humblest materials.

Coming back to our author's narrative, we see it must have been

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

somewhat late in the evening when Jesus and the disciples set out on their way to the Mount of Olives. It would, however, be very moonlight, as we know from the fact that Jewish festivals were fixed and regulated by the changes of that orb; and there is, we think, no

impropriety in supposing that in honour of her Creator's presence she may have shone upon our earth with something more than her ordinary brilliance.

We do not know in what part of the city the house where this Passover had been held was situated; and the phrase, "went out

into the Mount of Olives" is one of much latitude. The natural presumption is that the company were making their way for Bethany, though destined not to arrive there.

Whilst on their way to Olivet, Jesus declared, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." The precise meaning of this stumbling at, or being offended with their master on the part of the disciples is not clear. Most probably it means that they would be disappointed and disheartened with this night's occurrences. They had, however, been fully and repeatedly apprised of them.

And Jesus goes on, with that peculiar disregard of context even in the self-same sentence to which we have become accustomed, to quote from Zechariah the words here given. Though we have become utterly wearied with the simile of shepherd and sheep, it is impossible not to own some real analogy between the latter and these disciples in what follows. Sheep are timid animals; and the way in which the apostles scattered themselves shortly afterwards was undeniably sheeplike.

Jesus adds that after his resurrection he will go into Galilee; appointing, as we afterwards learn, a particular mountain there as the spot where the disciples were to join him.

32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee yet will I never be offended.

34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

Peter was a quick-spoken man, and in answer to Jesus' saying that they would all be offended because of him that night, declared, with a not exactly felicitous implied reference to and comparison with his colleagues, that though all others might thus be offended he himself never would.

Jesus, in response to and rebuke of this self-vaunting of Peter, told him that this very night he would deny his master three times. Undeterred, however, by this positive statement of one who, he knew, could not make an erroneous one, Peter persists in traversing the accuracy of such a forecast; adding his determination to die with Jesus, rather than to deny him. How entirely correct and borne out by events this prediction of Jesus was, and how lamentably incorrect and unreliable Peter's vows proved to be, this chapter is brought to an end by recording; and to that place any further remarks on this subject shall be deferred.

"Likewise said all the disciples." Peter's very personal boast

and, as it were, challenge could not but be taken up by the rest. And there cannot be the least doubt that both with Peter and with all the others, these declarations were made with all good faith and sincerity, and probably with no little warmth of feeling also. How both faith and courage so speedily took flight in one and all of these apostles presents a highly curious study, natural as well as spiritual.

On arriving at a place called Gethsemane, Jesus bade the disciples

36 ¶ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

39 And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

sit down, whilst he himself went a little further on to pray. This command applied, however, to eight of the disciples only, Jesus taking with him Peter, James, and John. Whilst here, we read that Jesus began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

In explanation of what is recorded in these verses and of the additional statements found in the two following Gospels in reference thereto, theologians have recourse to the separation of the two natures of Jesus. The extremely hazardous character of such a separation is admitted; but with Trinitarian theologians there is no possible alternative. The idea of an omnipotent God suffering agony cannot be

held in the human mind, inasmuch as the two portions of the statement will not even temporarily cohere.

From this dilemma Unitarian theologians are, of course, free. Those misguided men, indeed, do permanently what even their Trinitarian brethren do temporarily. With such authorities, we cannot be wrong in thinking of Jesus as, at this juncture, human only.

In order, however, to think of Jesus in his human aspect only, we must necessarily consider as absent from his consciousness at this time the supernatural knowledge possessed by his higher nature. For if during this transient sorrow, however heavy, Jesus was conscious that in twenty-four hours all his trials would be over and he himself in paradise there to reign for evermore, it would not be possible for the most susceptible reader to feel any overpowering grief at sorrow so temporary, and known by the sufferer to be so. It is only by thinking of Jesus, instead of possessing the blissful consciousness we have named, as full of real doubts and real

apprehensions, that it is possible to feel our sympathies going out to him.

Speaking to the three disciples he had selected to accompany him, Jesus declared that his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; and he bade them tarry and watch with him.

It is not easy to gather what Jesus precisely meant these disciples to do by the injunction, "watch with me." For he himself left them and proceeded a little further on alone. "He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast," is stated by Luke, who also tells us that "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him."

How exclusively as human we must for the time being regard Jesus is further shown in the prayer which, on being alone, he addressed to God. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Momentary shrinking from an ordeal which it has been firmly resolved to undergo is eminently human, and has often been illustrated in history. And the words, "if it be possible," effectually exclude the supposition that there could at this moment be present in Jesus that divine consciousness of the Second Person of the Trinity in which it was known that escape from the drinking of this cup was not possible. At that impossibility Christians may lament, or rejoice, or do both as they may feel disposed; for our part we regret it deeply.

"Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Though Jesus wished to escape, and prayed that he might be permitted to escape, the ordeal through which it was written and fore-ordained by himself that he was to pass, he also prayerfully declared his resignation to whatever his Father's will might be. In a clause of the Lord's prayer delivered in Galilee some years before this, Jesus had laid down this principle, and enjoined men to pray God to have and accomplish his own will.

Into the general problem whether anything that is not God's will can possibly take place; and into the theory that human supplication can deviate that will, it is not needful here to enter. But if our supplications fail to concur with, or to deflect the divine will in the direction we wish, as they so often do, it is very clear that submission on our part is a course from which there is no alternative.

The uselessness of repinings at what cannot be altered, and the good sense of making friends with the inevitable are ancient pieces

of wisdom. Many of the ancient Stoics supplemented the quite sufficient natural reasons for such a course with the consideration of the piety of cheerful submission to the will of the gods.

The latter clause of Jesus' prayer has always been a great devotional favourite. That religion helps us to practise the virtue of resignation has always been one of its strongest claims, and one of its justest. If we can get ourselves into the frame of mind to regard what we do not like, but cannot help, as God's will, we may find repugnance thereto materially diminished, or at least repressed. It is a view and a sentiment that needs to be carefully guarded. In every religious system it easily slides, and has slidden, into very hurtful forms. Especially when submission to destiny or the course of events, whether regarded as God's will or not, takes the form of attempted indiscriminate approval and justification of events, it may lead to highly injurious influences and effects upon us.

On rejoining the disciples—whether the three only or the eight also is not very clear—our author records the most humiliating fact that Jesus found them asleep. It is scarcely possible to leave a perusal of this latter portion of the Gospel record with the slightest personal respect for these apostles remaining.

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

The exhibition of callous indifference here displayed by these apostles to their master and the believed Son of God is positively forbidding. "What," said Jesus, waking Peter, "could ye not watch with me one hour?" And again commanding them to watch and to pray, Jesus adds in apparent extenuation, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." To most readers it will, we think, feel that in this case the spirit must have been as weak as, indeed weaker than, the flesh.

Leaving the disciples, Jesus went away again and prayed as before. Coming back to the disciples a second time he again found them asleep; "for their eyes were heavy," adds our author in lucid explanation of the fact. What produced drowsiness so extraordinary it is not possible to imagine. Luke says the disciples were "sleeping for sorrow." Acute or keen sorrow is not

42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

43 And he came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy.

usually thought very conducive to sleep; how only too effectively it drives sleep away is the sad experience of most of us.

One would have thought the reproaches of their master in the previous case would have pierced these apostles to the quick; that very shame would have roused them. But their master's reproaches and his exhortations to watch were alike unheeded.

Jesus does not seem to have awakened these sleepy saints on

44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

his second return to them. He left them to their slumbers; and going away again, for the third time prayed as before.

Rejoining the disciples a third time, Jesus apparently discovered them again asleep, though this is not quite an inevitable conclusion. Whether they were awake at the third return of the master, or were aroused thereby, Jesus addressed them in the cutting words here given, "Sleep on now and take your rest." Some other interpretations of this phrase have been, it is true, suggested, but they are neither plausible nor intelligible. One of these suggestions is that the command, "Sleep on," should be taken in an interrogative sense as equivalent to, Will ye sleep on now? Many of the expedients used to grapple with Scripture difficulties are far worse than the difficulties themselves.

Understood in its literal sense, Jesus' command to sleep on

46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

could not possibly be complied with by the disciples; for it was at once countermanded by the order, "Rise, let us be going;" Judas and his company at this very moment, whilst

indeed Jesus was still speaking, making their appearance. The supposition that some little interval elapsed between the present verse and the last, and that the latter portion of the last verse should be regarded as a prophecy fulfilled by the concluding portion of this, is one for which there is not the smallest justification in the narrative itself.

It may just be remarked that the agony and other occurrences in this garden at Gethsemane are characteristically entirely omitted in that last Gospel whose author possessed special and peculiar knowledge of them.

Beyond the fact that thirty pieces of silver were the sum—the

47 ¶ And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

very small sum—agreed to be paid to Judas for his services, we have no knowledge of what had transpired or what arrangements had taken place between Judas and the priests. It is difficult to frame from the description of the occurrence here given any clear or intelligible picture of the arrest of Jesus; but when it is collated with the accounts found in the other Gospels, any consistent conception of the event becomes quite impossible.

“A great multitude.” The dimensions of the great multitudes so often named in this history will ever remain a point open to much diversity of opinion; but we can scarcely be wrong in assigning a very moderate estimate to the phrase in this instance. This great multitude was, it appears, armed with swords and staves; apparently expecting, and thus prepared for, a possible emergency requiring their use. Judas was aware of the two swords in possession of his late colleagues and of Jesus’ injunction to procure the weapons. This information he would have given no doubt to his employers, the chief priests and elders; hence the preparations here named.

In personal appearance Jesus differed so little from his disciples that he had to be pointed out by Judas. The prophet who had created so much commotion on his entry into Jerusalem, and whose raising of Lazarus had just made such a ferment, was so little known to any of this great multitude that it was necessary for the ex-apostle to identify him. For this purpose a pre-arranged sign had been agreed upon; namely, that Judas should approach and kiss his late master.

“Hold him fast.” Judas had been an intimate companion of Jesus for some years. He had beheld Jesus calm the tempest and rebuke the wind and the waves; he had witnessed Jesus feed thousands of men, women, and children without food; he had watched him open countless blind eyes, open deaf ears, raise the dead to life, and expel legions of devils. Nay, from Jesus’ own hands Judas had himself received like powers; powers which he had, we cannot doubt, himself freely exercised, to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, cast out devils, and raise the dead also. And yet here, says Judas, “hold him fast”; apparently believing in the possibility of so doing, whether Jesus acquiesced in the process or not.

Even amid the surroundings of such a narrative it is impossible to suppress the feeling how brimful of downright absurdity such a picture is.

Judas as we here read carried out the sign agreed upon. To no Christian believer living do we yield in detestation of the act—and the actor—here described. Odious in the last degree is every feature of it. In the most highly pitched denunciations of this incident all may concur. In one minor point, perhaps, some comments hereupon go wide of the mark. As a mode of salutation, a kiss did not then imply what it now does with us. It was a current salute or recognition partaking of the nature of a formalism and not regarded as expressive of the extreme familiarity it is with us now considered. This is shown by the general exhortation given to Christians to salute each other in this special manner; an exhortation which Christians show much good sense and good taste in leaving uncomplied with.

An aspect of this verse more painful still is raised, if we think of Judas—as we presume we must—as being the mere physical habitation of a certain other being.

Jesus gave to Judas a very gentle, deprecating accosting. “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” a phrase of which many and various analyses are given. It cannot be denied that Jesus’ last preceding words to Judas, “That thou doest do quickly,” had been complied with.

“Laid hands on Jesus and took him.” The Creator of the Universe, Reader, was now arrested; an event that, we must own, entirely baffles any contemplative capacity of ours. The history of the world abounds with sorrowful arrests, and with wise, and great, and noble prisoners. But such things in no way help us to realize the apprehension and the taking into custody of our Creator here recorded.

In the fourth Gospel we are told that this armed multitude on beholding Jesus, who had spontaneously made himself known, “went backward and fell to the ground.” Unhappily they got up again, and proceeded with their original purpose. And on seeing hands laid upon Jesus, “one of them which were with” him, who we learn

49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.

50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, Wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus, stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.

52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place:

for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

elsewhere was none other than Simon Peter himself, drew his sword, and with that sword effected the painful but not alarming stroke here described.

We find some difficulty in thinking of Peter as a military man. He was a curious mixture of martial, and, as we shall soon see, very un-martial qualities. And the smile that we cannot subdue as we think of Peter's coming down from that upper room with sword by his side and of the weapon's reposing by the side of its slumbering owner in the garden, is surely no very great impiety.

On seeing what Peter had done, Jesus rebuked him and bade him put up his sword into its place again. It is pleasant to learn from the third Gospel that Jesus touched this smitten ear and "healed" it. The subject of this most pleasing miracle was named Malchus. It seems natural to think Malchus must have become a Christian after this. But we hear no more of him. Alas! Reader, what a typical "subject" in this respect Malchus was! The subjects of Jesus' miracles were even more phlegmatic than the spectators of them.

Though it scarcely seemed a very suitable time for doing so, Jesus, in addition to his command to Peter to put up his sword, laid down the general proposition here given. Taken literally, the statement that all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword is not true; or at most a very partial truth only. Those who wish for anything of the kind will find in commentators a great variety of figurative and spiritual exegeses of this phrase to choose from.

Only a few hours ago, at the Passover in the upper room, Jesus had enjoined everyone to procure a sword; even, if necessary, by the sale of his garments. And he was quite aware that Peter was carrying this very sword about with him. Would this maxim not have been better propounded a little earlier? Is prevention not better than even miraculous cure? The whole subject of these swords is an unintelligible and unedifying medley. The almost simultaneous commands to procure swords and to put them away would puzzle even apostles.

A strange problem for Peter's thinking, and for the thinking out,

53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

if that were possible, of Gospel readers also, is here proposed by Jesus. In the next verse, it is true, Jesus gives an answer to his own problem. But unfortunately it is an answer in the proximate and nominal sense of the

word only. It is an answer in which the problem itself not only remains, but is even acutely emphasized.

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than 12 legions of angels?” Without for a moment suggesting that the occasion was not worthy of more than twelve legions of angels, or of the entire heavenly host even, we are strongly of opinion that the odd angel who had just been with Jesus in the garden strengthening him, would have been amply sufficient for the purpose here suggested to Peter. How a single angel—possibly this very same—caused the Roman soldiers who guarded Jesus’ tomb to become as dead men, our author shortly after this duly informs us. And there can be no doubt that such an appearance would have had that same happy effect upon this armed multitude also.

What Peter thought of the problem is not known; nor, if known, should we attach any very great value—in its purely natural sense—thereto. We have just seen that even the prayers of Jesus are subject to a great If, an, “if it be possible.” We do not profess to comprehend in what sense anything can be not possible with the Jehovah to whom all things are possible. Be this as it may, it is clear from what we have read that compliance with the prayers even of Jesus will be withheld if those prayers run counter to definitely fixed arrangements. Hence we are driven to the conclusion, from what Jesus himself adds in the next verse, that even had these twelve legions been prayed for as here suggested, they would not, because they could not, have been despatched. Given a certain event that must be accomplished, and swords, prayers, and everything else are vain to evade it.

There seems, however, in the question here put to Peter, a naive assumption that if prayed for by Jesus these legions would be sent; and this verse is invariably dealt with as if Jesus could, if so disposed, have actually summoned them; that he thus magnanimously refused an actual possibility of rescue.

On this theory Jesus suffered and even courted death with the admitted power to avoid it. Hence all other martyrdoms offer no analogy to this of Jesus. Most martyrs, it is true, could have saved their lives, but only by recanting and abandoning their cause; not otherwise. But Jesus could have saved his not only without recanting, but by a method which would have irresistibly established his cause and confuted and convinced his enemies. What a pity certain other martyrs did not possess the same glorious option!

These angels were neither asked for nor sent. And in reply to his own question, and in explanation of his not acting upon his own suggestion, Jesus here, in the form of another question, furnished the response and the solution.

54 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

“But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?” Fulfilling Scripture may be all very well as a proximate reason; but why the Scriptures were thus written is the real question raised. If the Scriptures could not be written otherwise than as they are, and once written were bound to be carried out, then to summon twelve legions of angels to frustrate their fulfilment is an idle suggestion; the raising of an impossible supposition merely to knock it down again. If fulfilling the Scripture was absolutely obligatory upon Jesus, then we are bound to answer the question he propounded in the last verse in the negative.

What particular Scripture is here referred to we do not know. We so greatly lament the violent death inflicted upon Jesus by the Jews, that if we could find the passage or passages of Jewish Scripture in which that event is predicted, we should bear a very keen antipathy thereto. But in spite of every assistance from learned theologians, we are unable to discover the Scripture in question.

“That thus it must be.” Fatalism renders everything it touches absolutely lifeless. The possibility of any alternative being struck out, events become an elaborate and most uninteresting dumb show. The fixed mechanism turns out its result according to order, and with a mathematical precision. Not only Jesus himself, but everybody else concerned in these melancholy occurrences, was under the same resistless obligation to fulfil Scripture.

Jesus now addresses to the multitude a complaint. “Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me?” There is an evident tone of indignation in this question. And it is not at all improbable that with a disorderly multitude near midnight, Jesus may have suffered some more or less unpleasant usage. In a plaintive tone Jesus adds, “I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.” How far any of the multitude here spoken to had listened to Jesus during the few preceding days in which he had appeared and taught in the temple, it is impossible to say. It

55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

may be remembered, in confirmation of Jesus' statement, that the multitudes who listened to him in the temple, and took him for a prophet, saved him from being laid hold on by the priests. The third Gospel makes the chief priests actually present amongst this multitude, and Jesus' question is there somewhat varied in keeping with that fact.

"All this." How his narrative fulfils Jewish Scripture our author continually points out to us, from the

⁵⁶ But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

selection of Bethlehem for Jesus' nativity, and the mourning caused there by the visit of the Magi, to the exact price paid to Judas. In the latter part of this verse he goes on to record

an event which the prophets very considerably only alluded to, we believe, if at all, in very general terms.

"Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." A few hours ago, at the Passover in the upper room, there had been a contest amongst these disciples—who should be first. Here, alas! there was another contest amongst them—who could be remotest. It has been an ever-recurrent regret to us throughout this Gospel that Matthew did not lay aside his ill-judged and ill-timed modesty; did not assure his readers who he truly was; and did not write in the first instead of in the third person. How greatly, in some instances how immeasurably, the narrative would have gained by being openly given as that of Matthew, an apostle and an eye-witness, is constantly impressed upon us. Here, for example, how much more vivid would have been the words, We all forsook him and fled, than the phrase here used!

This flight of the apostles is indeed an ugly thing to think of. There is only one possible explanation of it, and that is, that their faith in the master had taken flight also. The ordinary Christian hypothesis that these men were deliberately deserting and fleeing from the presence of one whom they positively knew to be the divine Being is too inane to be entertained. These men, there can be no doubt, liked and loved their master; but their faith in him at this time was obviously practically nil.

Contemplated even in its purely human aspect only, this base desertion by these apostles is most humiliating. The ordinary human sense of honour and sense of shame would have preserved most men from such ignominy. Not a troop of the roughest soldiers would thus have left their captain; they would have shared his fate, were it death or capture. And the history even of lost

causes is full of heroism; of men's clinging to each other and resolving, nay demanding, to share a common fate.

Whatever else it may be, this odious conduct of these apostles is a humbling and a disgrace to our common human nature. Their master's injunction to "beware of men" had impressed them much more vividly than his injunction to "fear not them which kill the body." And when we reflect—if it be possible really to do so—that every man of them could raise the dead to life again, the scene becomes utterly ludicrous. Bad indeed as their whilom co-apostle, Iscariot, was, he would not at this time suffer greatly by comparison. Judas had lost his faith; and, what is much worse, lost his honour also. But he still retained his courage.

It is often deplored, a perennial lament, how feeble is the faith now to be found amongst mankind; how faint and weak even the best and strongest of religious belief really is.

But when we reflect how frail was the faith of those fellow-mortals who witnessed the most extraordinary manifestations, and who personally received the most absolute and convincing assurances, our surprise at the scantiness and the faintness of modern belief is greatly abated.

These eleven apostles, as also the other one, had consorted with the Second Person of the Trinity for some years; had beheld all his mighty works; had heard from his own mouth not only all we possess in these Gospels, but countless other utterances also. And yet at the first breath of danger they flee! Nor is that all. The chief apostle, who had even listened to God's own voice from heaven, when challenged, disowned everything, and with oaths and curses denied all knowledge of "the man." And the two others, who had with Peter been especially singled out to witness the transfiguration of their master on the mountain, and to see the still living Moses and Elijah, fled like the rest. All these men too had assurance made doubly sure by the bestowal upon every-one of them of the most copious miracle-working power, which they had doubtless abundantly tested and proved. And who can forget the melancholy story of the Baptist struggling on the eve of his own death with the miserable query, "Art thou he"? And the very last we hear of these eleven apostles—after the recorded resurrection of their master even—is the pregnant little phrase, "But some doubted."

If men who had heard God's own voice; who had been in the

daily presence of his "only begotten" son for years; who had beheld the innumerable miracles Jesus wrought, and had received from him unstinted power to work such wonders themselves; if such men could be so faithless, what can reasonably be expected of us in these days who have never seen a single wonder of any kind and without a single believer around us with a sufficient grain of faith to perform the very tiniest?

Instead of all these things, what have we to fasten our faith upon; we who look out on the world and find the huge old creeds here in the time of Jesus here still; an immense new one founded since he founded his; and his own household of faith a house divided against itself, a set of warring sects, rapidly losing the faith and often the respect of all that is best of the character and intellect of the age?

A strange midnight conclave, Reader, is here described to us.

57 ¶ And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

It is to be supposed that this strange nocturnal convocation was met for the special purpose of dealing with Jesus, though we cannot be positive on the matter. Anyhow, such a gathering at such an hour does these priests, scribes, and elders little credit; and what we read of its proceedings gives us a very sorry and coarse notion of Jewish ecclesiastical assemblies. It is however to be borne in mind that this narrative is an eminently *ex parte* representation, and that much of what we here read bears on the face of it a high degree of palpable and intrinsic improbability.

"To Caiaphas the high priest." There are three persons who figure conspicuously in the accounts of the arrest and trial of Jesus—Judas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. Of the first of these, there is only one possible opinion. Traitors and informers ever justly receive the execration of all men. Nor is there in the case of Judas, so far as can be gathered, one iota of palliation. We read that many who walked with Jesus walked with him no more; and if Judas, though one of the chosen twelve, having lost faith in the new system and its founder, had taken a like course simply, no one could have found fault. But to remain and help to compass the death of the leader he had accompanied so long is a dark act capable of no extenuation.

Concerning the second of the three—Caiaphas—it is difficult to explain how or why he has to some extent escaped the odium that

in Christian feeling and history has gathered around the other two. For unquestionably Caiaphas was far more responsible for the death of Jesus than either Judas or Pilate; Judas indeed, however guilty, being a mere subordinate and instrument of the chief priests. It was these latter who really compassed the death of Jesus, and upon them, in the main, rests the stigma of his martyrdom; as indeed upon the same profession mainly rest the martyrdoms of all ages, all countries, and all systems, before and since. For the statesmen and officials who have nominally carried out these cruel sacerdotal instigations have, with few exceptions, done so lothfully as Pilate very clearly did in Jesus' case. The term *vipers*, which Jesus applied to these priests of his Father, is, whatever we may think of its justice in other respects, literally applicable to all priesthoods in one point—their dealings, when possessed of the needful power, with all beliefs and creeds other than their own. And it is indeed a mournful reflection to make as we read the narrative now before us, that the blackest product of all the ages—the Inquisition—was the work of Jesus' own priests.

Of the last of these three—Pilate—it is impossible for any reasonable-minded man to concur in the views once so prevalent; and it is gratifying to find in all later Christian literature greatly modified and more just estimates of this Roman official. It is abundantly clear that Pilate in no way desired, and in no way instigated, the movement that led to Jesus' death. Nay, it is clear he wished to save Jesus from his real enemies. And if he at last consented and gave his sanction, he manifestly did it from policy or weakness, and in no sense whatever from malice. It is surely desirable that in this Gospel history, as in all histories, merit and guilt should be righteously apportioned.

We confess, however, that to us, the overriding theory that Jesus came to earth with the pre-ordained object of being put to death, that there was no possible escape from that result, and that consequently some unfortunate beings had to play the parts necessary to that end, casts an air of repellent fatalism over this part of the Gospel history, and robs it of all natural interest whatever.

Our author does not tell us whither he and the others wended their way. But Peter, it appears, suspended his flight, and following the prisoner and his jailors "afar off" made his way to the high priest's palace "to see the end." As we shall

⁵⁸ But Peter followed him afar off into the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

presently see, it would have been well had he remained away with his co-apostles.

The "judicial" proceedings here set before us compel us either to question the right of the Jews at this time to the title of a civilized people, or to regard the account here given as being largely a travesty. The procedure of this Sanhedrim, as here described, resembles that of a drum-head court martial, but without any of the grim dignity and honour of the latter.

Our author favours us in these verses with a peculiarly striking specimen of his lucidity. The chief priests and elders, indeed "all the council," sought false witness, says Matthew. It was certainly getting quite time to supersede Judaism and Moses' seat with a more decent system of some kind.

But though these successors of Moses and official representatives of Jehovah on our earth were thus engaged in the search for false witness, they found none. "Yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none." From this it may probably be gathered that this Sanhedrim was not to be satisfied with the false witness they for some time met with. Probably it was either too false or not false enough.

At last, two false witnesses made their appearance who seem to have satisfied this strange tribunal. They convicted Jesus of a boast that he was able to destroy the temple and re-build it in three days. It is scarcely possible to preserve any gravity as we think of the ludicrous medley here presented to us.

In the second chapter of the last Gospel we learn that Jesus at the beginning of his public life paid a visit to Jerusalem; and that on that occasion he cleared the temple, by the very prosaic process of a "scourge of small cords," of the drovers and money-changers who polluted it; a proceeding which, according to our author, he had repeated about a week ago on his final arrival in Jerusalem.

On the occasion of the former of these two exploits we read in that last Gospel that the Jews on witnessing it asked Jesus for his credentials for assuming such authority, and that Jesus answered and said unto them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this

59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;

60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses,

61 And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" No answer of Jesus is given; John—not Jesus himself—simply adding, "But he spake of the temple of his body." How the Jews were to gather this we do not know. This truly wretched metaphor thus became the proximate cause of Jesus' death.

There is something half-sorrowful, half-humorous in the thought that Jesus was convicted and found guilty of a figure of speech. The figure of speech itself richly deserved convicting. The mischief wrought in the world by such phrases has been immeasurable; and some little vindication of the prime, and only worthy, purpose of human language—to convey natural and clear meanings from one to another—is the only morsel of satisfaction discoverable in this memorable "trial."

Matthew terms these two witnesses false; a view in which the fourth Gospel makes it impossible to acquiesce. The simple truth however is that this tribunal needed no false witnesses whatever. If religious innovation and hostility to an established creed be the crime they were once everywhere thought to be, no more clear and transparent case than that of Jesus of Nazareth ever came before any of the many courts that have sat upon and judged that "crime."

After these two witnesses had borne their testimony, the high priest arose and asked Jesus for his answer to their charges. Receiving no reply, the high priest then called upon Jesus, in the solemn manner here stated, to openly declare whether he was the Christ, the Son of God.

62 And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

It may here be remembered that up to a late period in this Gospel history the disclosing of the fact that he was the Christ was sternly forbidden by Jesus; nor can it be clearly gathered whether since that date the fact had in any way been publicly divulged or not. If we accept our author's narrative, many members of this tribunal—not improbably even Caiaphas himself—had a few days previously witnessed at the hands of Jesus what to us moderns seems tenfold more convincing on this matter than any number of personal declarations. For we read that the blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple and he healed them; and that the chief priests and scribes saw these wonderful things, but unhappily, were sore displeased with them.

To this solemn appeal of Caiaphas, Jesus replied with the confirmatory phrase, "Thou hast said," adding that hereafter these judges should see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. The use of the phrase Son of man in response to the phrase Son of God used by the high priest seems very marked and very noticeable.

Jesus, as we know, had declared in Galilee that there were then present persons who should not taste death till they had seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom. To these chief priests, scribes, and elders such a declaration would no doubt be complete news; and the assurance that they themselves were to see their prisoner coming in the "clouds of heaven" could not fail to startle them.

In what way these chief priests, scribes, and elders ever beheld Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven we do not know. Theologians have many, indeed far too many, solutions of the difficulty. The suggestion we ventured to offer when remarking upon the like declaration of Jesus in Galilee, however deficient in other ways, still seems to us to possess the very great advantage of being the simplest and clearest solution of it.

Having duly complied with the Mosaic injunction to rend clothing on hearing blasphemy, Caiaphas in a transport of indignation declared that Jesus had uttered blasphemy; and that now they had themselves heard his blasphemy, asked what need there could be of further witnesses.

Whether this indignation of Caiaphas was sincere or feigned has been much argued. There is no real difficulty in accepting either view; for both priestly hypocrisy and priestly sincerity are, and have ever been, very ordinary phenomena. There can be no doubt whatever that to these men and to all earnest and devout Jews, the full Christian theory of the Trinity would have been painfully and sincerely shocking; and a definite statement of the idea that the prisoner now before them—to all appearance a human being like themselves—was a member of the triune Godhead would unquestionably have genuinely horrified this assembled council. The words used by Jesus certainly did not convey so much as this; but they implied vague and enormous claims incapable of being thought of as regards any merely human being. What Jesus had

64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

65 Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

just asserted could not fail to grate upon the piety of this assembled council, and in denouncing the statement of Jesus as blasphemy there can be little or no reasonable doubt that Caiaphas gave expression to the real feelings of himself and his compeers.

It is a melancholy but unquestionable truth that almost all the great iniquities and martyrdoms that have been perpetrated in the world have been wrought conscientiously. Even the dreadful tribunal established by Jesus' priests inflicted its countless cruelties and crimes from the one sincere desire, and sincerely believed duty, to protect the true faith. When men embrace a false theory the false actions that follow from it may be as sincere and from the heart as the best and wisest of proceedings. It is the demolition of vicious theories that has rendered these latter ages so just and so humane.

Of all the arrant follies recorded of our race the practice of tearing one's clothes from vexation or indignation may make a very good claim to bear the palm. When we picture a man setting to and tearing his clothing, and think of the sorry spectacle he would present when his labours were ended, it seems as if the ludicrous aspect of the scene must have overpowered all others. In the book of Acts we read how Barnabas and Paul went through this proceeding; from which we learn how, in following the example even of apostles, much discretion and good sense are very necessary.

Upon the high priest putting the question, "What think ye?"

66 What think ye?
They answered and said,
He is guilty of death.

to the council, the answer was, "He is guilty of death." Though we cannot here be sure of it, it seems highly probable, as stated in the next

Gospel, that this was their unanimous verdict. And the expression found in the next Gospel, that with the high priest "were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes," would lead us to think it was a very full, if not absolutely complete, council.

On reference to the other Gospel accounts of this trial we find the various narratives not only discrepant but largely incapable of being blended or even harmonized. Into these divergencies it is in no way needful to enter. We may just here quote the dialogues which passed between Jesus and this council as there reported.

In the third Gospel we find that the council asked Jesus, "Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand

of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth." Whilst acknowledging the agreement in substance on many points of this account with that given by our author, it is scarcely possible to help thinking what very free versions of an occurrence and dialogue two "inspired" writers can give.

In the fourth Gospel we read, "The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why asketh thou me? ask them which heard me what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

The constant injunctions to secrecy and to "tell no man," and especially the rigorous command to keep the central fact of his own Christship secret, which we have met with in our author, seem a singular comment upon what Jesus stated to this council according to the last Gospel. And to us the question, "Why asketh thou me? ask them which heard me," seems very unreasonable. It is not possible for anyone to have a worse opinion of this wretched tribunal than we have; and we are sorry indeed Jesus submitted himself to it. It was in his power, as we know, to have defied and to have crushed it. But having decided to submit himself to this ecclesiastical inquisition, we are unable to see the propriety of thus flouting it. There are, too, in these replies of Jesus we have just quoted from the third and fourth Gospels some very curious, and assuredly some not very prepossessing or reassuring items.

Coming back to our author, we thus behold Jesus condemned to death at the hands of this ecclesiastical assembly for blaspheming. Dictionaries tell us that blasphemy is impious irreverence to the divine being. Here, Reader, we behold God himself convicted of blasphemy by a human tribunal and duly sentenced to death; a sentence unhappily carried into effect. Such is the strange demand made by Christianity upon the human mind.

Jesus of Nazareth was thus condemned and was put to death for being a religious innovator and a blasphemer; the self-same ground upon which many good men before the time of Jesus had met the same fate, and the self-same ground upon which many more good men have suffered it since, the most lamentable reflection being that Jesus' own system has proved the most fertile of all in the committal of this shocking deed.

The penalty prescribed by the Mosaic code for the offence of which Jesus had been thus adjudged guilty was death—death by stoning. It needs but a slight exercise of the imagination to realize what a particularly cruel, and probably prolonged, form of inflicting torture and death such a method must have been. As we think of missile after missile poured upon the victim, hitting now an eye, now a tooth, making here a gash, and there a gash, the victim's only hope being that some merciful stone might stun him, and thus end his agony, we may, though but faintly, picture what stoning to death must have been.

From this heaven-prescribed, and, alas! self-prescribed, form of the death penalty for his offence Jesus was preserved by the fact that the Jews were not then at liberty to carry out their divine code on many matters without securing the sanction of the heathen dogs who happened at this time to be supervising the affairs of Israel. And fortunate indeed for the fate of Christianity, as we shall presently point out, was it that instead of stoning, another kind of death, perhaps equally cruel, but far more striking and dramatic, was inflicted upon its founder.

Who were the "they" here referred to? Connection and

context would lead us to suppose that the persons last referred to—the members of this council—were the offenders in question. Lucidity is not a virtue of our author's; but it is not easy in the case of an ambiguity so obvious and so suggestive to think that our author was quite unconscious that he was

67 Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,

68 Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?

leaving the point open to a variety of inferences. The other accounts lead us to infer that it was the immediate jailors of Jesus, the priests' servants and other underlings, who inflicted these indignities upon Jesus. If anyone, however, chooses to think that these chief priests and scribes and elders took any part therein, there is nothing whatever to prevent his doing so; and we shall not

undertake to dispute the point. Concerning the interesting subject of the voluntary, or supposed voluntary, submission of Jesus to these very offensive proceedings, we delay our thoughts until we come to a renewal of these indignities a little further on, and where they are described in greater detail.

Thus, Reader, ends this extraordinary nocturnal conclave and "trial." Need we add that we do not possess any "official" account or version of the event?

Our author now suspends his main narrative for the purpose of

69 ¶ Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

recording the conduct of Peter at this memorable juncture; and a startling and melancholy story it is.

Following the account of the event given in this Gospel, it appears that Peter "sat without in the palace." He had, as we read a little while back, followed Jesus, though "afar off," to the high priest's palace, and had gone in and "sat with the servants to see the end." Whether he was ever present at the place where Jesus was tried it is impossible to make out, as it also is to ascertain whether the episode now related took place before or after that trial.

While Peter was thus sat, a damsel came and accused him with having been with "Jesus of Galilee." This he denied before all present, declaring in a fencing, evasive way to the damsel, "I know not what thou sayest." Peter had a peculiar horror of equivocation, as we see from the severe way in which he afterwards dealt with that alleged weakness in the case of Ananias and his wife.

70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

After this, Peter apparently rose and went out into the porch.

71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

Here, unfortunately, he encountered another damsel, who also made another like charge against him—that he had been with Jesus of Nazareth. These maids evidently considered the society of Jesus not very creditable company.

Peter was now becoming irritated with these charges; denied this second charge with an oath; and added, "I know not the man"—the man who had given him power to heal the sick, cleanse lepers,

72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

cast out devils, and even raise the dead ; the man who had given, or at least promised, him the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet a third time was Peter accused of complicity with Jesus.

73 And after a while came unto *him* they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art *one* of them ; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

There might almost have been a conspiracy to torment Peter ; and doubtless he was now without his sword or some of these tormentors might have experienced the fate of Malchus without the happy sequel in his case.

The third time, Peter was taxed with the same offence by a number of bystanders ; who supported their imputation by telling him that his Galilean speech betrayed him. Peter's provincial speech had evidently attracted the notice of these dwellers in the capital, who either spoke the national tongue in all its purity, or had a special version of their own as is often the case with metropolitans. Unless we suppose that Jesus had the same Galilean accent also, it seems singular that constant converse and intimate companionship with the master had not purified Peter's speech.

Theologians assure us that what is true of other things holds

good in spiritual matters—one backsliding begets another. In denying this third charge Peter became vehement, began to curse and to swear, and repeated that he did not know Jesus. In indulging in this profanity it seems

74 Then began he to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

probable that Peter's provincial accent would come out still more strongly. And it is certainly alarming thus to learn that Peter knew so well and so readily how to curse and how to swear ; we begin to wonder what Peter's antecedents can have been before Jesus called him. It is much to be feared that the lake of Galilee had heard many an oath from Peter whilst handling his nets and his fish.

“The cock crew.” The punctuality with which this famous fowl raised his voice at the proper instant leads us to the belief that the hypothesis of a fixed future applies to other animated beings not less than to ourselves. Fixed for that precise moment was the voice of this chanticleer beyond all earthly possibility of interception or deviation.

The crowing of this cock leads us to think that it must now have

been approaching daybreak ; for unfortunately those marks of time which give such clearness to a narrative and assist us so greatly to comprehend it, are rarely given in these Gospels.

75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me

thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

In the next Gospel, where Jesus is given as predicting a double cock-crow, a double cock-crow is also narrated. Whether Peter heard the first one we cannot be quite sure, but if so it had at any rate no effect upon him; but on hearing the second crow the prediction made a few hours ago by Jesus was "remembered" by Peter and overwhelmed him. It is greatly to be feared that the consciousness of his master's prophecy must have been present with Peter all the time he was repudiating that master.

In the third Gospel this part of the incident as here given is greatly improved upon. By some process not easily conceivable, Jesus is in that Gospel given as actually in Peter's presence during these denials; and on hearing the third one, "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter"; whereupon Peter "remembered" what Jesus had predicted.

"He went out and wept bitterly." After the foregoing painful and trying narrative, it is the custom of Christian commentators on reaching this clause to break out into exclamations of relief; their sorely harassed feelings finding vent, some in pity for the chief apostle, some in rejoicing at his restoration to his true self; some are awe-stricken at the attestation the incident affords of Jesus' omniscience; others dwell upon the faithfulness of the Gospels in recording such an incident; and others give homilies upon the frailty of human nature so conspicuously exhibited in so great a saint; whilst all seem to find in Peter's flood of tears a great, if not a total, ablution of his falsehoods. From some of these views we entirely dissent, and to the others we are able to accord only a very partial concurrence.

"He went out." Under any circumstances, but more especially if we accept the version that Jesus was present and had heard Peter's lies, this going out was the one thing that Peter, upon recovering himself, ought not to have done. It was the addition of cowardice to falsehood. Apart altogether from any higher, or so-called higher, considerations, it was Peter's plain human duty and the imperative call of honour to have remained and to have declared and owned to all present the real truth.

Instead of this, Peter went out and relieved himself with tears. And to tears his repentance strictly confined itself. He did not manfully return and own the truth and follow his master. He disappeared from the scene, and we hear of him no more until after the death and burial of his disowned leader.

Few things appeal to the tender feelings of our common nature more than penitential tears. But they should be fittingly accompanied by becoming acts if our sympathy is to continue. And when pietists call upon us to yield our sympathy as we picture the tears trickling down the face of Peter—the man who soon after this struck people dead for offences not comparable with his own—for no offence at all, indeed—we have no option, Reader, but to firmly decline to respond to the appeal.

It may be remarked that in neither of his epistles, nor in any of his utterances in the book of Acts, does Peter refer to this interesting occurrence.

MATTHEW XXVII.

THE condemnation at the hands of this ecclesiastical court which

CHAPTER XXVII.

1 *Christ is delivered bound to Pilate.*
3 *Judas hangeth himself.* 19 *Pilate, admonished of his wife,*
24 *washeth his hands:*
26 *and looseth Barabbas.* 29 *Christ is crowned with thorns,*
34 *crucified,* 40 *reviled,* 50 *dieth, and is buried:* 66 *his sepulchre is sealed, and watched.*

1 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:

Jesus had now undergone, was not sufficient of itself to put him to death. The Romans had wisely withdrawn from that court the power to inflict the death penalty; and had thus happily overruled much Mosaic legislation.

“When the morning was come.” It is generally considered that this was a second and separate meeting of the Sanhedrim, and that Jesus’ formal condemnation took place thereat. The plain truth, Reader, is that it is impossible for anyone to frame a clear conception of these occurrences from what our

author gives us. The midnight proceedings recorded, if not described, in the last chapter, leave a very confused impression on a reader’s mind. And if light be sought in the other Gospels, instead of being found the confusion simply becomes greatly increased. The difficulties found in the Gospel accounts of the trial or trials of Jesus are confessed by all the better Christian authorities and writers thereupon; clear comprehension only being alleged by the poorer sort of professional harmonists, the same who can reconcile Genesis with Geology, and, if need be, with anything else.

The purpose of this second ecclesiastical council, if it be a second one, was to take counsel how Roman sanction to and enforcement of its cruel object could be obtained. The effort of religious animus to get its dark desires carried out by the always unwilling, but

often yielding, secular authority is a spectacle with which history only too plentifully abounds.

“And when they had bound him.” In what way Jesus was “bound” there is nothing but imagination to guide us. As many of these chief priests had seen Jesus cure the lame and open blind eyes it seems natural to suppose they would deem severe precautions necessary. Judas, however, as we have seen, deemed the holding fast of Jesus quite feasible.

The pinioned and manacled king of heaven, the Creator of the Universe in chains, is a favourite subject with a well-known type of piety, which invites us to contemplate with melting hearts that wonderful and sorrowful phenomenon. We can only say, Reader, that if our existence depended upon our power to respond to that invitation, then death would be our certain fate.

Scarcely has our author begun his account of the bringing of Jesus before Pilate, than he suddenly interrupts it to apprise us what became of the traitor. It is an untimely and infelicitous digression, entirely unworthy the trouble of making.

3 ¶ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.

The predicted and fixed destiny of Jesus to the cross affects the narrative recording it in precisely the same manner that any other record is affected when regarded from a fatalistic standpoint. One consequence is to cause the human accessories to the supposed fixed result feel to be mere automata whose actions, whether thought of as free or forced, have been foreseen, calculated upon, and exactly fit into. Everything is felt to be pre-arranged; and, whether the individuals concerned are considered as voluntary agents or appointed instruments, their actions are a mere playing up to a given end from which deviation is impossible. In the case of Judas these considerations are aggravated by our having to think of him as a mere instrument in the hands of Satan.

“Repented himself.” This phrase has greatly exercised theologians, who give a variety of subtle disquisitions upon it, always including a warning to us not to think of this repentance of Judas as we are to think of that of Peter. Whatever may have been the nature and extent of Judas’ penitence, it was sufficient to make him return to the priests the silver he had received from those worthies; an

action which in anyone else than Judas would have been regarded by Christians as very meritorious and as betokening deep and manifest sincerity.

On coming to the temple to tender the chief priests and elders the money received from them, Judas declared, the money received from them, Judas declared, "I have betrayed the innocent blood." This, so far as it goes, is very satisfactory. But was this all that Judas could say, and did say, to these men? Was this all, that, having repented and possibly then designing to end his life, Judas felt constrained to tell these priests and elders concerning Jesus? Is it not strange he did not declare to these men the whole truth—namely, that Jesus was the Christ; that, as one of the chosen twelve, he had witnessed all the mighty works of Jesus and by derivation from Jesus had wrought mighty works himself? Instead of all this, which after repenting one would have thought Judas could not have helped making known, he merely makes the candid but tame assertion that he has betrayed innocent blood. Was this all Judas could say because all he really believed?

"What is that to us?" The callous behaviour of these chief priests and elders to the now penitent traitor they had made use of, justly excites the loathing of Christian and all other readers. No one, we presume, would now care to take the part of these accused men, and question the validity of this account. The successors of these chief priests and elders who now minister to the spiritual needs of the scattered children of Israel might possibly be disposed to do this. And if so disposed, they might well ask how our author got his knowledge of what passed at this interview. There is no hope that the Christian hypothesis of our author's inspiration would be received in satisfaction of that inquiry. Nor, if received, does it bind us to the literal accuracy of what is here ascribed to these chief priests and elders. A comparison of the different accounts of the same incident and dialogue found in these inspired Gospels at once shows us that inspiration does not imply exactitude or verbatim accuracy; that it was an afflatus which left to the penman extraordinary scope for variety, including some very troublesome kinds; and even to the indulgence of curious personal characteristics on the part of the writer. It cannot be a very sinful charity to doubt if our author is quite just to these elders and priests.

4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that.

After casting down these coins in the temple, Iscariot, says our author, "went and hanged himself." The part played by Judas thus ended in his own death apparently before that of his master even.

5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

"Hanged himself." This seems a very commonplace ending of the traitor. The Jews had a special aversion to hanging or strangling as a mode of procuring death. Judas' choice of that particular method is not easy to explain, unless we agree with the older theologians that he was in Satan's hands to the end, and that the latter thus showed his contempt for his tool. It is possible to suggest another explanation of the statement—if not of the fact—that Judas hanged himself. We have just remarked how consistent with variety, even very awkward and inconvenient sorts, celestial inspiration is. Another inspired penman has given us quite another account of Judas' end.

"Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." We doubt if a more melancholy spectacle is conceivable than that of fair-minded men painfully trying, because thought to be a duty, to show us that Judas bought this field, and yet that the chief priests bought it; that Judas both hanged himself and met the fate we have just quoted; the most painful part of all being the transparent failure of such attempts to pacify those making them, followed by the palpable tendering to others of what has in no way satisfied the tenderers.

After the departure of Judas, these chief priests we are told

6 And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.

took the money he had brought back to them; and then discussed and took counsel what should be done with these coins. Wretched and mean as such a scene is in all its natural aspects, its supernatural aspect is worse still. Here in this temple and sanctuary of Jehovah, to which at this time the faithful

of Israel had made their pious annual pilgrimage from all parts, the chief priests of Jehovah are engaged debating what to do with Judas' returned money; money which had been disbursed by these same chief priests of Jehovah for bringing about the death of Jehovah's only begotten son!

One feels, Reader, on thinking of this pitiful subject, that the

anger and the scourge of small cords that had just been used to clear this temple from some dove-sellers would have been better exerted in clearing it of the sacerdotal officials who really disgraced it.

The result of this sacerdotal taking of counsel was the conclusion that the coins in question could not be put into the treasury—they were the “price of blood.” Whether these same thirty pieces of silver had originally come out of this same sacred treasury is not stated; but it is highly probable they did.

Gold and silver that have been the proceeds of doubtful dealings have often found their way into the many and various religious treasuries of the world. These have indeed the world over ever been regarded as especially appropriate receptacles for conscience money of all kinds; from the brigand’s humble offering up to the munificent donations from ill-gotten gains to which we owe so many a stately religious edifice.

These chief priests, however, as we see, were very susceptible on this point. Had these coins found their way into the sacred treasury, they might have helped to purchase some of the vessels, vestments, incense, pots, and other utensils used by these worthies in the practice of their profession—a clearly unpleasant thing to think of. The worship of Jehovah by means of such funds could not be entertained. It was therefore decided to use the money for the purchase of a field to bury strangers in—a purpose which we do not hesitate to declare, Reader, a much nobler and worthier one than that first thought of by these priests.

The field thus purchased must have been a small one, or land in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem very cheap.

The field thus obtained and used for the purpose of putting dead strangers in acquired from the origin of its purchase money, says our author, the name of the field of blood—a name, he adds, it retained up to the time of his writing this Gospel.

8 Wherefore that field was called. The field of blood, unto this day.

“Unto this day.” This phrase, used again shortly afterwards, has always been regarded as pointing to an interval of long duration between the occurrence itself and the compilation of this history of it by our author. Not only sceptics, but also Christian scholars who contend for a somewhat late date of this Gospel, have probably made more of this phrase than it necessarily warrants. At

the same time, its natural import is that of a very considerable or long interval.

Our author concludes, fittingly concludes, his account of the proceedings of these chief priests in this matter, by assuring us that they were predicted by Jeremy the prophet. It is a pity Jeremy had not a subject better worth predicting.

9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value;

10 And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

It appears, however, that our author was under a mistake in ascribing the "prediction" he here "quotes" to Jeremy. The prediction, such as it is, is in Zechariah. How Zechariah

equals Jeremiah is a theological equation to which the older commentators at once addressed themselves; and their exploits in this apparently difficult demonstration are a real treat, which make the timid suggestions of later commentators regarding Matthew's "quoting from memory," "clerical error," and "immaterial error" feel very tame.

Anyone who will refer to the "prophecy" of Zechariah and compare it with what is here given as such, will be startled at the inaccuracy or the glaring unscrupulousness which our author exhibits; and it is undeniable that such things deeply shake our confidence in his general trustworthiness. And what a singular frame of mind must be needed in anyone to soberly declare that the passage of Zechariah here referred to was seriously meant as a forecast of the incident just related! Could any rational being have ever divined this? Of such prophecy, if prophecy it be, to confuse and not to enlighten must have been the object, as it was clearly the result. The alleged Messianic prophecies given to the Jews served not to illumine and guide them, but to darken and confuse them as this Gospel shows; and richly did such a species of prophecy deserve such a fate.

Willingly do we leave this unpleasant subject of the false apostle. It would have been good for him, said Jesus, if he had not been born. And it would certainly have been good for him if he had not been called. The fore-knowledge, yet choice, of Judas by Jesus, is one of those many items of supernatural Christianity which, like its eternal hell, openly flouts the human mind. The acceptance of religious mysticism which is morally unobjectionable, however incomprehensible, such, for example, as the Trinity, may be perhaps justified, however little to be commended. But to

religious mysticism of a bad type there is one paramount duty, and that is to spurn it. And of such a type is the alleged known and deliberate choice of a false apostle.

Our author now resumes the account of the appearance of Jesus before Pilate, which he had so inopportunately and unworthily interrupted for the purpose we have seen. This description of the proceedings before the Roman governor is certainly a clearer narrative than that of the midnight proceedings of the Sanhedrim, though when it is compared with the accounts given in the other Gospels, conspicuous incongruities appear and greatly harass us.

On the arrival of Jesus with his custodians and priestly accusers in presence of the governor, Pilate at once put to Jesus the direct and specific question, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" a very natural and proper question for Pilate as *de facto* governor of Judea to ask. According to the third Gospel, on arriving in the presence of Pilate, the priests and elders immediately accused Jesus of denying Cæsar and claiming himself to be King of the Jews; a charge which would, of course, render Pilate's question absolutely necessary.

In reply to this inquiry of Pilate, Jesus used the same unsatisfactory form of response he used throughout the judicial proceedings ending in his death—"Thou sayest." In the last Gospel Jesus answers Pilate's question, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" by asking Pilate another. "Sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it thee of me?" an answer or question which seems to have irritated Pilate, who replied, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done?" How tedious the quarrellings of other religions than their own always seem to men!

The spectacle of these chief priests of Jehovah thus accusing and aspersing Jehovah's son may be thought of as pitiable or as portentous. In its natural aspects the scene was one the like of which had then been, and has since been, only too familiar in human annals. How often the chief priests and religious elders of the world have figured as prosecutors, and the men and things they have prosecuted, is a sorrowful story indeed.

11 And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

To the "many things" charged by his accusers against him, Jesus, we read, listened in silence. This total silence of Jesus has been variously explained, and may be very variously regarded. To simply ignore such charges and treat them with silent disdain was, in the opinion of many, a becoming and dignified course; some think it nothing short of sublime and divine. The answer, the somewhat threatening answer, given by Jesus to the Sanhedrim, that they would see him coming in the clouds of heaven, had not influenced that body, and was scarcely worth repeating for the sake of Pilate only.

13 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?

14 And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

Others explain this complete silence of Jesus as being in fulfilment of the prophecy that as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth. Of the truth of this supposition we will offer no opinion; but we will take the liberty of differing from the prophet as to the soundness of his simile. Sheep may be dumb in the sense of not possessing articulate speech; but the piteous bleatings they utter on the occasion in question are not a very apposite or happy simile for supposed voluntary and unprotesting silence.

But whatever may have been the true cause of Jesus' silence, it is obvious that refusal to plead or reply before a lawful tribunal must always have an unfavorable effect if acquittal be desired by the accused, which however was not the case in this instance, if we understand the Christian scheme aright.

"He answered him to never a word." It is undeniably surprising to find on reference to the fourth Gospel that Jesus not only answered Pilate, but entered into converse and even argument with him; and, in fact, favoured Pilate with a little dissertation of the true Johannine order.

In the third Gospel we read that during these proceedings before Pilate the fact leaked out that Jesus was a Galilean. And on hearing this news, which would seem to show that, though the fame of Jesus had long gone over all Syria, it had not previously reached Pilate, it was decided by Pilate to send Jesus for trial before Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, who was then in Jerusalem; having, doubtless, come up with other pious folks to eat his Pass-over in the holy city.

To Herod Jesus was accordingly sent. To Gospel readers this

meeting of Jesus and this little potentate, who was Jesus' earthly "sovereign," is not pleasant to think of. It is impossible to forget how that tetrarch, in pursuance of a rash vow, had decapitated the Baptist; and it is clear he had not in any way reformed his ways in the interval that had since elapsed. Herod, we read, was exceedingly glad to see Jesus, having long wished for an opportunity of so doing. We may remember that he feared Jesus to be John come to life again.

To Herod this interview proved a disappointment. He had hoped to see Jesus work a miracle, and he questioned him in many words. But Jesus refused to speak; and after Herod had listened to the chief priests and scribes, who it seems had followed Jesus and "vehemently accused" him to Herod, the disappointed and, doubtless, annoyed tetrarch along with his "men of war" mocked and derided Jesus, put a gorgeous robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. Including the appearance before Annas, Jesus seems to have undergone five "trials."

A singular and humorous custom is here described to us. In celebration of this annual Passover feast the Roman governor was accustomed to release "unto the people" a prisoner of some sort; "whom they would." It appears the Romans had always some one in jail whom the people more or less liked; a very probable state of things in a country subjugated and ruled by foreigners as was the case in Judea at this time. The oddest part of this custom was that the people could take their choice, and select from those in prison at the time whom they would have liberated; a piece of consummate contempt on the part of the Romans which shows us how they derided the Jews and all their affairs.

Amongst those in jail at this time there was, it appears, a certain Barabbas. Here he is simply termed a notable prisoner. In the two following Gospels he is stated to have taken part in an insurrection or sedition and to have committed murder therein. The last Gospel calls him a robber. It is clear he had been concerned in some movement or tumult which had the sympathy, more or less, of the people. And as the request for the release of Barabbas was sanctioned, indeed suggested, by the chief priests and elders, we are forced to the conclusion that Barabbas must have been a respectable character.

¹⁵ Now at *that* feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.

¹⁶ And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

In accordance with the foregoing custom, Pilate asks the assemblage whom they wished him to set at liberty this feast; and proceeds to suggest Barabbas, concerning whom Pilate must have possessed due official cognizance, or Jesus "which is called Christ." For Pilate knew, adds our author, that it was "for envy" Jesus had been delivered. The persons who felt this envy of Jesus, though there might be some difficulty in definitely gathering this from our author, were the chief priests as we are expressly told in the next Gospel.

17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

It is not very easy to see in what way the sentiment of envy in the ordinary sense of that word could be probable towards Jesus on the part of these chief priests; except in the case of those of them who had seen Jesus heal the lame and give sight to the blind, who might well envy him that glorious faculty. But in what normal sense these priests could envy Jesus is not very perceptible. They might hate him as a religious innovator, as an upsetter and disturber of the existing faith, and as a menacer of their own personal situations and emoluments; and as such, they might either condemn him or fear him. But how priests can be supposed to envy one they regard as a false teacher is not intelligible. Some think it was Jesus' popularity with the people that made these priests envy him; but for our part, Jesus' popularity with the people is, we must own, Reader, not very easy to clearly discern.

Our author now degrades his narrative by relating a very trumpery circumstance. Whilst Pilate was sat on his judgment seat, his wife sent word to him not to have anything to do with Jesus, "that just man"; inasmuch as she had suffered many things that "day in a dream because of him."

19 ¶ When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

Our author does not allege that this woman's dream—which introduced at such a juncture feels to be such miserable trifling—was a celestial intimation. It is not possible, indeed, to conceive of it as such, for had it been effectual with Pilate, and stayed the condemnation of Jesus, it would simply have frustrated heaven's own intentions; and how then could the Scriptures—its own Scriptures—have been fulfilled? Some good authorities have, on account of this obviously frustrating tendency, ascribed this dream to quite another quarter.

Wherever this dream came from, it was a failure; for Pilate treated it with deserved neglect. Well deserved; for if even heaven itself, as we are assured at the beginning of this history, will humble us and itself still more by the use of a medium so truly wretched as dreams, contempt is the only becoming response. Regarded as a natural occurrence, this woman's dream was a piece of trumpery; regarded as a supernatural one it was so also, and a total failure as well; regarded any way it was beneath contempt even.

There are no dreams in the other Gospels; but our author had a morbid weakness for them as the introduction of this pointless one here shows; and as the five which embellish his first two chapters had previously exemplified to us.

Undignified indeed must have been the spectacle of these priests and elders begging and persuading this multitude to ask for Barabbas and not for Jesus. But sorry as we unfeignedly are that this multitude were so persuaded, we are far from feeling sure they needed very much persuading.

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

Be this as it may, the very last to throw a stone at these chief priests and elders should be Jesus' own chief priests. From the time when they themselves acquired, some three centuries after this, the power to do so, up to those crusades which were their special work, and which deluged this very holy land itself with fruitless bloodshed, history is studded with black deeds to which the priests of Jesus egged on the people. And since those crusades, though in happily ever lessening quantity, what an array of dark and doubtful deeds lies at the door of the Christian priesthood! The innumerable victims of the witchcraft superstition and the countless sufferers of that black tribunal whose proceedings are the darkest record of all time, not to name other things, make the up-turned eyeballs and lacerated feelings of Christian theologians who comment on the action of these Jewish priests not much better than a piece of sheer Pharisaism, however sincere they may be in a personal sense. When did chief priests as such ever urge on the people to a great and good deed in history? We have been trying to call to mind any such case, Reader, and have failed; though we will not say there has never been such. Even the noble Christian priests of all the many kinds who aided, for example, in ending slavery were thwarted by as many of their compeers who, Bible in

hand, defended it. In our own days we cheerfully and thankfully own that Christian priests of every kind often co-operate in good works, especially in all charitable and philanthropic work they consider to be on safe "Christian" lines. But who can say they even yet help in the spread of new enlightenment or help in the struggle for the realization of juster ideals? Even in these later decades every reform has found them in the main opponents, not friends; and the "clerical party" is yet in every country a phrase whose meaning is only too well known to every reformer and lover of human progress.

Pilate had apparently received no answer to his previous question,

21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

and again asks the multitude which of the twain it was their good pleasure should be released unto them. To this second inquiry he received the answer, Barabbas. The fate of Jesus thus at this point seems to have rested

with the populace. How far indeed this multitude really represented the feeling of the people generally is a very uncertain point, which we have no means of solving.

On receiving the verdict of this multitude Pilate asked them

22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

what he was to do with Jesus. Was it not possible for Pilate to release more than one prisoner? Was one the limit of complaisance allowed by Rome? In any case, the spectacle of a judge asking a disorderly mob what he should do with a prisoner is not a very edifying one, and gives one, if it be true, a not very exalted idea of the forms of law and

justice then dispensed in Judea.

According to the third Gospel, Pilate persisted at some length in his attempt to save Jesus from these priests, elders, and multitude; suggesting that he should chastise Jesus and then liberate him. All his efforts were vain, and only increased the clamour for Jesus to be crucified. There is nothing known to us which can explain how it came that Jesus was so obnoxious in the eyes of this multitude. The only approach to a solution is that these elders and priests must have worked on the religious feelings of these people by showing them what impious blasphemy against the pure faith of Israel his doctrines were.

Happy, however, was it, if we rightly understand the Christian

scheme, that this populace was thus minded; that it preferred Barabbas to Jesus, and thus abstained from what would have been nothing short of the fatal and disastrous liberation of the Prophet of Nazareth.

The "fate" of Jesus now rested solely in the hands of Pilate.

24 ¶ When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see *ye* to it.

It is difficult, Reader, to write down such a sentence with any degree of sobriety. The thought of our Creator standing at the bar of this Roman official to receive sentence is too much for decorous contemplation. And the denunciations lavished by Christian writers upon Pilate for not frustrating the Christian "scheme" by liberating Jesus simply disperse any mental gravity that might possibly remain.

Looking at the conduct of Pilate in its purely natural aspects, even as described by these palpably one-sided Gospel representations, it presents no very easy problem to give judgment upon. Whether Christians should rejoice or lament that Jesus was crucified and that Pilate "decided" in favour of that event we leave to them to determine. For our part we deeply lament that Pilate did not determine otherwise.

Jesus, we must remember, had admitted that he claimed to be King of the Jews; and even if we accept the account of the fourth Gospel that instead of, as here stated, the governor marvelling greatly that Jesus answered him never a word, Jesus had explained to Pilate that his kingship of the Jews did not apply to worldly matters—it is still very evident that to a Roman governor a person claiming to be King of the Jews, even in some mystic sense, would appear a source of no little danger in the case of a people so tumultuous as those under Pilate's care. Jesus too had been condemned, apparently unanimously, by the Jewish Sanhedrim; and to annul the decision of that court must have seemed to Pilate no light responsibility to take. On the other hand if, as here stated, Pilate believed Jesus to be perfectly innocent, and considered his kingly claim to be no real source of danger to Roman authority, his prime duty was to acquit him. In any case Pilate's earnest personal desire was, it is clear, to free Jesus. How often has this been the sincere wish of the lay officials who have carried out ecclesiastical crimes!

That Pilate was utterly unconscious of the supernatural bearings

of the proceedings before him is very evident. There was nothing in the personal appearance of Jesus to mark him out from other men; and there is nothing whatever to show that Pilate had any knowledge or intimations of any sort that the proceedings before him possessed any extra-natural import.

Having decided to release Barabbas and deliver up Jesus to them, in compliance with the request of the Sanhedrim and the clamour of this multitude, already threatening to develop into a tumult, Pilate, we read, went through a ceremony which has been much criticized on the score of improbability. It is not very probable Pilate would go through the childish proceeding here named on his own account. But we must remember that it is a ceremony ordered to be gone through on certain occasions in the Pentateuch; it is a sort of baptism on a small scale, and based on the same idea. We may well conceive that Pilate was aware of this ceremony, and went through the process merely to impress the multitude. When we reflect how full of the death penalty the Mosaic code was, and how often the Sanhedrim may have come to Pilate to have got that divine code sanctioned, it is rather to be feared that Pilate and other Roman governors may have often washed their hands in this way.

It is a great relief to have reached the end of these many trials of Jesus. Looked at in their natural sense, the records of them are confusing, difficult to follow and to even partially grasp; and the trials themselves, from a human standpoint, are exceedingly humbling and exceedingly unedifying. Regarded from their supposed major and supernatural point of view, as trials of the divine Being by a number of human tribunals, we have no choice, Reader, but to declare, in fulfilment of the purpose of this work, that to us they are more unedifying still.

This verse gives us the impression that this "all the people" must have been in reality a street mob of a very low type. The exclamation, "His blood be upon us and on our children," could only come from the coarsest of the coarse. The

²⁵ Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

attempts to show that the sack of Jerusalem by Titus, the dispersion of the Jews, and the cruelties they suffered at Christian hands, were the divine fulfilment of this imprecation, which the older theologians more especially seemed to take a delight in making, do those making them little credit. A little of the fig-tree or Ananias

treatment would not have been unpleasant to read of here. But the right of those brazen clamourers to entail things on their children and remote descendants, and especially on the children and descendants of others not concerned in these proceedings, or the right of heaven to comply with that odious request, we steadfastly deny.

Before we pass on to the events related in the remainder of this chapter, it is impossible to help asking ourselves, Where at this time were the "very great multitude" which only a few days ago hosannahed Jesus into the city, which had spread their garments and cut down branches of trees to spread in the way of the colt that bore Jesus into Jerusalem, and which had taken part in that triumphal entry which, according to our author, had moved "all the city"?

At this particular time, too, Jerusalem was full of Galileans. Had none of the thousands of men whom Jesus had miraculously fed come up, like himself, to this celebration? Had none of the many blind to whom Jesus had restored sight, none of the many from whom he had ejected devils, none of the many cleansed lepers, none of the endless numbers with whom he had healed all manner of sickness and disease come up to Jerusalem to celebrate a thanksgiving Passover?

Where, too, were the lame and the blind he had healed even in Jerusalem? Were none of these manly enough to come and own the hand that had touched their once sightless eyes and revived their once helpless limbs?

And where, whilst this multitude was demanding Jesus' blood, were the eleven apostles; those mightily endowed ones who could heal the sick, cast devils, and raise the dead? Where especially was the weeping Peter, and where our author? Dismal indeed is the echo that alone answers these irresistibly arising and insuppressible questions.

After the release of Barabbas, Pilate proceeded to scourge Jesus: scourging being the usual prelude to crucifixion. In the animadversions of Christian commentators upon this odious cruelty as applied to Jesus, and as applied to anyone, we cordially join. The harshnesses and the barbarities once universal which stained, though in very varying degrees, all ancient codes, and which obstinately existed in many respects until quite recent times, make

us, when we think of them, proud of the humane age in which our lot has been cast.

After this, Jesus was delivered to the soldiers of the governor to be led away to crucifixion. But before this

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

was done, these soldiers, we read, took Jesus into the common hall and there inflicted upon him a number of personal indignities; some of which were possibly cruel, but which consisted mainly of a rough species of banter and raillery.

Whilst Jesus was before the Sanhedrim he had been buffeted, spat upon, and smitten with the hand; in one instance during the trial itself even, which led Jesus to protestingly exclaim, "Why smitest thou me?"

Few things now repel us more than to read of the barbarities inflicted upon convicted prisoners, and sometimes on unconvicted ones, not only in antiquity, but even up to quite recent times. It is sometimes claimed for Christianity that it is to its softening influence that better practices on this subject now exist—a claim that has about as much foundation as most of the other claims made on its behalf. For to within little more than a century ago, not only in our own country, but throughout Christendom, the penal codes were simply barbarous, death being the penalty of what would now be classed as even minor crimes. And the treatment of prisoners and the state of prisons in Christian countries, after seventeen centuries of Christianity, more intensely believed than it has ever been since, were shocking to think of.

No, Reader, the plain truth is, that we owe amelioration on this subject to the rationalistic spirit of investigation and experiment to which we are indebted for every other enlightenment, and to which we shall owe every future enlightenment that will yet bless the human race; that spirit of inquiry which, whilst treating existing ideas and things, and the supposed wisdom of those who have lived before us, with the true deference to which they are entitled, refuses to allow those or any other pleas to exempt anything whatever from just and sober examination and re-examination.

The malice of and the contumelious treatment of Jesus by the Sanhedrim and its dependants were to be expected. Men who have been denounced as hypocrites, vipers, whited sepulchres, and children of the devil, could hardly be expected to be very urbane in

return. But some items in the conduct of these Roman soldiers to Jesus seem difficult to understand.

No doubt a person claiming to be king of the Jews, in the position now occupied by Jesus, would have to these soldiers its irresistibly ludicrous aspect; and Jewish institutions were objects to them of very scant respect at all times. The raillery of this band of soldiers as shown in the scarlet robe—probably the one Herod had used for the same species of mockery; in the mock thorn crown, the reed sceptre, the derisive bent knees, and royal hailings—is not difficult to understand. The spitting upon and smiting of Jesus with the reed are less intelligible. Probably they were the work of some base nature, or natures, not often it is to be feared entirely wanting in a troop of soldiers.

Whoever amongst this troop of soldiers suggested the crowning of Jesus with a mock crown made of thorns, unintentionally rendered a rare service to Christian piety. We are far from sure that this crown of thorns was altogether what it is now usually represented as having been. But be this as it may, this famous thorn crown has

29 ¶ And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

been sung and hymned, like the star of Bethlehem, which unhappily guided the Magi to that place, in some little good poetry, and any quantity not good. Upon this thorn crown have been lavished volumes of pious prose, some really eloquent, some very strained; the burden of all of it being to call upon us to regard this affliction as the greatest ever endured by man. We should be but too thankful, Reader, if we could only believe that none of those who have suffered in the cause of humanity ever experienced greater anguish than that momentarily suffered from a crown made of thorns, however conceived of.

A reed sceptre is an item which does not readily lend itself to the purposes of piety.

Having removed the scarlet robe, and presumably the crown of thorns and the reed sceptre also, these soldiers restored to Jesus his own raiment and led him to the place of crucifixion. According to the fourth Gospel, Pilate brought Jesus out of the common hall before being divested of his thorn crown and purple robe, and thus arrayed, showed him to the chief priests and others.

30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

This was a last attempt on the part of Pilate to save Jesus. But it was vain. The chief priests and others clamoured for Jesus to be crucified, declaring that by their law he had incurred death by claiming to be the Son of God.

The patient submission of Jesus to the insults he received before the Sanhedrim, to the scourging commanded by Pilate, and to the indignities and raillery to which he was subjected by the band of soldiers, rouses some Christian writers to a high pitch of admiring rapture. Pietists dwell upon the voluntary endurance of such treatment by Jesus with great unction and fervent admiration. Many are lost in wonder and adoration as they think of it. The cheerful endurance of all these things by him who could have scattered those inflicting them with a breath, is declared to be nothing short of sublime.

We are now nearing the end of our task, Reader, and to its prime purpose we shall remain faithful to the end. Unfeignedly and deeply sorry have we often been in the course of this work at our inability to join in the admiration and applause we found others bestowing on the subject-matter dealt with. In this instance we are especially sorry. But we have no choice but to write down our true conviction, which is, that in the willing submission to honourably avoidable evils by whomsoever endured, we can discover no single shred of anything that is either admirable or sublime.

If voluntary submission to honestly avoidable evils be admirable, and an example worthy to be followed, it is indeed time for men to reconsider their usual course of action. For avoidance of evil is simply the normal object of all rational human endeavour.

Putting aside the very important question how far such submission on the part of Jesus to these indignities tended to mislead those inflicting them and spectators also into the belief that he could not help himself, and thus to confirm their notions of his being a mere pretender, we proceed to ask, Was such submission a salutary precedent, and in itself admirable; and if so, in what does its salutariness and admirableness consist? This question may be asked all the more freely in that this particular attitude towards opponents and enemies was neither the invariable nor the usual one with Jesus. It is only necessary to call to mind the cords with which he effected the first of the two temple clearances to show us that Jesus could give as well as receive stripes.

And when we remember how throughout this work we have been compelled to dissent from the continual severe and extreme epithets applied by Jesus to his enemies, and even to those who could not be justly termed such, we feel that silent submission to his foes was neither a habit nor a general principle of conduct with Jesus. The treatment, the everlasting treatment he has himself in store for all enemies, and even for all who did not respond to his doctrines, we know only too well; and it throws a strange glare over the few hours' submission of Jesus to his enemies here recorded.

Calmness and patience under unavoidable calamity are by universal consent admirable; the brave endurance, the sustaining with fortitude of trials that cannot be resisted and cannot with fidelity and honour be escaped, has ever justly received the appreciation of men. And the grounds of such admiration are clear. But the proposition that submission to evil is admirable in one who could have cast aside and overcome with a word those inflicting it, and who could also have turned the hearts and illumined the minds of these same enemies, is a proposition addressed to us in vain.

The deplorable and supposed fatalistic necessity of Jesus' being put to death simply paralyses everything connected with it. Every desirable mode of action, every better alternative is struck out by such a theory. "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," was, according to the third Gospel, one of Jesus' last sayings. Enlightenment of that deplorable ignorance was, by the Christian hypothesis, out of question. The fixed intention of Jesus to be martyred unnaturalizes everything leading or appertaining to it.

The patient and lamb-like endurance of the insults and suffering offered to him by Jesus is declared to be a saintly example that should have softened those beholding it. Whether it ought to have done so or not, it certainly did not. And as it appears from Jesus' own admission, that the participators in these indignities knew not his unexerted power to have prevented them, it is not easy to see how the bearing of those things by Jesus should affect men differently from the compulsory bearing of the like things seen in others. Into the general principle of the offering of the second cheek to the smiter of the first, its supposed beauty and supposed efficacy, we have entered at the outset of this work.

It may, perhaps, not be out of place, as bearing upon the true method of receiving and regarding insult and mockery, and as bearing upon the varied examples and the variety of precedents offered

us by divine Scripture, to reflect how one of the prophets treated, with power derived from Jesus, even the mockery of little children; for we read that he cursed them in the name of the Lord and caused them to be torn to pieces. Reader, we are lovers of gentleness; and yet we admire also the exhibition of a timely indignation. But we can find neither in the atrocious example of the old prophet nor yet in the example of the Prophet of Nazareth any rational encouragement to either quality. As deeply as any Christian do we abhor the indignities here described as inflicted upon Jesus. But the invitation to admire his unused power to prevent or resent those indignities is an invitation we have no option but to decline.

This verse gives one a strong impression of the disorderliness of these proceedings. It was part of the punishment of those condemned to crucifixion to have to carry their own cross. According to the fourth Gospel, Jesus himself did so. Here, we read that on coming out on the way to Golgotha a bystander, or passer-by, named Simon, who came from far-off Cyrene in Africa, was laid hold of and compelled to carry Jesus' cross. Who Simon was, and why singled out for this purpose, is matter of pure conjecture. The not very enlightening fact given in the next Gospel that Simon was the father of Alexander and of Rufus is the sole additional knowledge of him we possess.

It is stated in the third Gospel that the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus were led at the same time to Golgotha. Presumably each of these bore his own cross; and as Jesus was just in the prime of vigorous manhood his exemption from the carrying of his own cross seems not very probable. Many think he may have been too exhausted by the scourging to do this; but this does not appear more probable in the case of Jesus than in the other two cases; or more probable than in similar cases generally.

The site of Golgotha—upon which the more euphonious Latin name of Calvarium or Calvary has since been bestowed, and by this "authorized" version even inserted in the third Gospel—is unknown. It is named in these Gospels only, no mention of it being found in any Jewish writings. Various conjectures have been thrown out as to why the spot received so unpleasant a name; the most probable being that it was the usual place of carrying out crucifixions.

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

The locality of Golgotha being unknown, its distance from the hall of judgment is, of course, a matter of surmise only. Let us hope the distance was not great, for the procession with its surroundings would be a very melancholy one.

Luke tells us that on his way from the hall to Golgotha, Jesus was followed by "a great company of people and of women which also bewailed and lamented him." To these women Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

Though these women were addressed as daughters of Jerusalem, we may well believe that there were also present the mother of Zebedee's children who had come up to Jerusalem, and probably other women from Galilee. Mary and Martha from the adjoining Bethany would doubtless be there also. Alas! Reader, the sons of Thunder were not present. The younger of those sons has, like our author, received much Christian praise for the candour displayed in his Gospel. We think both would have increased their titles to that virtue by a little frankness as to their own whereabouts at this time; the silence of John being unsatisfactory, and the admission of our author that he had fled being too vague. The risen Lazarus, too, was absent; probably actual acquaintance with the king of terrors had increased his original aversion to that experience. In any case, this speech of Jesus to the women present makes us scorn the absent men he could not address.

A drink of some more or less stupifying kind was often mercifully offered to those about to be crucified. On arrival at Golgotha, a mixture here termed vinegar and gall was offered to Jesus. By whom such a nauseous compound was offered is not stated; it could not be for any very

34 ¶ They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

kindly purpose. On tasting it, Jesus refused to drink it. The omniscience of Jesus is curiously made use of in these Gospels; sometimes it is strikingly displayed to us; sometimes it is in complete abeyance. As Jesus knew what this potation was, why taste it to ascertain?

In the next Gospel the drink offered to Jesus is called wine and myrrh—a much more probable and inviting mixture. Of this drink we read in that Gospel that “Jesus received it not.”

35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

“And they crucified him.” The details of crucifixion are left unrecorded. As we try to picture the scene—Jesus and his two fellow-sufferers laid against their crosses; their outstretched arms and legs affixed to the timbers; the nails driven through their hands and their feet; then the three crosses uplifted,

and their victims left to linger in pain, he the happiest to whom death comes soonest—as we think of these things, a feeling creeps over one of profound thankfulness that our race has outlived the barbarities man once inflicted on his fellows.

And what, Reader, are we to think of the figure hanging on that middlemost cross as we thus mentally picture the scene? Well, for ourselves, we can only declare that if we are free to regard that human form thus painfully outstretched as a member of the human family and that alone; as one who in some respects adorned our species; as one who taught many things that were good and noble; as one who held up in many things better ideals to those around him; then, in spite of not a few and heavy counter-considerations, we can contemplate the mournful scene with true sorrow, and think of it with keen sympathy in our inmost heart.

But if we are forced to think of the centre figure thus hanging at Golgotha as an incarnation of a member of the Trinity just about to step back to heaven, with the intention, if we understand these Gospels aright, of eternally torturing many, if not most, of our species, including as regards ourselves almost all those we have known best and loved best, then, Reader, we do not feel one grain of sympathy as we think of the scene, and respectfully but firmly decline to profess any.

The form of death suffered by Jesus was a Roman method of the death penalty; and had no connection with Jewish ideas or doctrines. And it is not a little singular that in all the so-called Messianic prophecies, which, as we see from this very verse, could deal with such minute matters as the casting of lots for Jesus’ clothing, no allusion to the striking and distinct feature of death on the cross is discoverable.

The particular form of death Jesus thus happened to undergo

has undoubtedly exercised a very important, nay an immense, influence upon the fate and history of his religion. Crucifixion is a striking, telling, and, if the word may be used, a picturesque form of death. It is an extremely effective and conspicuous form of martyrdom; it brings itself to and impresses the imagination in a peculiarly vivid way.

Had Jesus, like a certain other "blasphemer" four centuries earlier, been made to drink a cup of hemlock; had he, like many benefactors of our race, been cast into a dungeon to slowly pine away; had he, like so many of his own followers, been burnt at the stake; or had he ended his life in one of the more instantaneous and merciful forms now used for administering the still unworthily retained death penalty, all the merits and virtues, natural or extra-natural, that may be ascribed to Jesus' death would not have been one whit less, but the occurrence would have been robbed by his non-crucifixion of a striking and effective feature which has been turned to great account ever since.

The cross—an extremely prosaic implement—has been converted by piety into a veritable religious talisman. In some parts of Christendom the crucifix is looked upon very much as certain similar little religious articles are looked upon in other lands in connection with other faiths. It is regarded with the same rapture, the same affection, and the same trust and belief in its potent efficacy, confirmed by so many trials of that efficacy and unshaken by so many disappointed trusts therein. Not seldom, too, it is much to be feared, does the crucifix receive that grosser regard paid by the humbler types of our race to objects quite as, but not more, inherently unattractive.

Jesus' great Church makes, and has always made, copious use of the cross, literally and emblematically. To such a pitch had this grown, that at the uprise of Protestantism much of it was denounced as open idolatry. Amongst Protestant Christians the use of the cross in its outward and visible form has in the main, though not entirely, disappeared. In some of the older Protestant churches the cross is still used in a timid and subdued fashion; and it is still—often in a curiously toned-down way—to be seen surmounting their edifices, helping the lightning conductor by its side to ward off the oftentimes sacrilegious storms of Nature. The newer and younger forms of Christianity have, as a rule, rigidly banished the material cross in all its shapes. But they have

another use of the cross; a spiritual use, which is perhaps not less effective than the other. In what is called, or calls itself, Evangelical Christianity, the cross—symbolically and figuratively—plays as great a part as does its material counterpart in Jesus' principal ecclesia. In hymns and other emotional ways the cross is there used very abundantly; and often in ways that, though termed spiritual, are as gross as, if not more so than, material adoration. It would not, we believe, be easy to exaggerate the aid lent to Christianity as a religion by the very striking form of death inflicted upon its founder.

Having thus accomplished the process of crucifixion, the soldiers, our author tells us, proceeded to cast lots for Jesus' clothing. Whether the same soldiers were in charge of all the three crosses, and obtained the clothing of the other victims also, we do not know.

And having narrated this little fact, our author proceeds to show how even it was predicted by the prophet, as he points out. The quotation is made from the twenty-second Psalm. The Book of Psalms contains, as we all know, much excellent as well as much objectionable matter. This twenty-second is one of the least happy in the whole collection. It purports to be an outpour of lamentation and mourning by the royal Psalmist. "I am a worm, and no man," is the theme of the Psalm; and in support of the allegation David adduces a string of metaphors and similes, and very pitiful drivel some of them are. The application of some of them to Jesus would shock even the most ostrich-like piety. One of these metaphors constitutes the "prophecy" here laid before us.

This is the last of the prophecies quoted by our author as fulfilled by his narrative. It is a not unfitting conclusion to the entire series.

What is meant by "they watched him there" is not very clear.

36 And sitting down,
they watched him there:

To gaze upon these crosses must have been a painful thing, though, as we see from this Gospel, many of Jesus' foes indulged in the sight; and, according to the Fourth Gospel, some of Jesus' nearest friends, including his mother, endured the spectacle also.

Over the top of Jesus' cross was written his accusation or supposed offence. Inspiration, as we know so well, does not guarantee verbal accuracy. This inscription is given differently in each Gospel. In the fourth Gospel we read

37 And set up over
his head his accusation
written, THIS IS
JESUS THE KING
OF THE JEWS.

that the wording of this inscription was Pilate's own choice, against which the chief priests protested; but upon which Pilate insisted. We also read that it was written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, three famous but now practically dead languages.

The two men crucified at the same time as Jesus are termed thieves or robbers; the name given in the last Gospel to Barabbas. Many think they may have been concerned in the misdeed of Barabbas, and condemned with him to the fate which we have seen how he escaped.

From the next Gospel we learn that Jesus was crucified at nine in the morning; and as he died about three in the afternoon, he remained upon the cross alive for a period of six hours; his body continuing thereon until even—probably some three or four hours more. During these six hours Jesus was upon the cross he was subjected to much derisive jeering, or reviling, as it is here termed. Passers-by—for the hill of Calvary is as mythical as much that has grown around it—wagged their heads at him, and invited the temple builder in three days to step down from his cross.

With the animadversions of Christian commentators upon these proceedings we in the main agree. The best and finest natures cannot, we think, jeer at suffering, even if thought to be deserved. And yet the supposed spectacle of a divine Being allowing himself to be put to death by a number of human beings must have seemed to spectators irresistibly ludicrous. The idea must have presented itself to them as a sort of divine suicide, if thinkable at all. And if Jesus was regarded, as he undoubtedly was generally, as a false claimant, the invitation to make good his claims by evading the preventible death he was palpably submitting to, is at least a very intelligible taunt.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders also, it appears, came to witness the sad spectacle. Upon this many Christian commentators grow eloquently indignant, forgetful at how many an equally cruel *auto-da-fe* Christian priests, scribes, and elders have since assisted. And in both

38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

39 ¶ And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42 He saved others: himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come

down from the cross,
and we will believe him.

43 He trusted in God;
let him deliver him now,
if he will have him: for
he said, I am the Son of
God.

case; "acts of faith" as sincere as they were cruel. Vehemently sincere beyond all doubt have been the religious martyrdoms in sufferers and inflictors alike of all countries and all faiths; and the reflection adds a yet deeper

sadness to those already most lamentable occurrences.

"He saved others; himself he cannot save." It is usually supposed the first of these statements is spoken ironically. We are told, however, that these chief priests and scribes, or some of them at least, had personally witnessed some of Jesus' wonderful works, consisting of the curing of the lame and the blind. Accepting that account, it would, of course, be possible to regard the statement of these priests literally; and if they believed in the reality of Jesus' cures of the lame and the blind, they would not have much difficulty in crediting his saving power with the raising of Lazarus, concerning which they had held a council we are told, and even greater things still. But the difficulty is to think how they could even attempt the death of one they really believed to be possessed of such power.

Whatever may have been the meaning, ironical or otherwise, of these priests, scribes, and elders in the phrase "he saved others," they add their belief that "himself he cannot save," a statement, as we know, quite true, though in another sense than that here meant. And like the passers-by, they call upon Jesus to come down from his cross, adding, that in that case they will believe him. It seems probable that Jesus would hear these taunts; we mean, of course, in the natural sense of hearing them. But he vouchsafed no reply, though, as we see here and in the other Gospels, he spoke several times whilst upon the cross.

"He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him." Here, Reader, we have once more an old and a familiar spectacle indeed—everybody appealing to God; everybody quite sure he is on their side. On the one hand we see Jesus trusting in God, but wondering why he has been forsaken by him. On the other hand we see God's own chief priests on earth calling upon him to deliver Jesus, "if he will have him."

But vain is the call upon heaven to recognize its own here on earth. Equally vain has been the call upon Jesus to do this since he went back to heaven. Even in the dreadful days when his own followers were alternately leading each other to the flames, vain

alike were the piteous cries of both to Jesus to recognize his own true sheep.

Looked at from another point of view, the spectacle of the lawful and acknowledged chief priests of the First Person of the Trinity jeering and deriding the crucified Second Person of that Trinity is indeed a spectacle calculated to raise strange reflections, and some very unpleasant trains of thought. Trains of thought, Reader, better not pursued.

Our author here, as we know, does a great injustice to one of these thieves. And his inaccuracy on this point illustrates how easily misrepresentations of an event may get abroad and convey even the very converse of the real truth. For whilst on his cross, one of these thieves became a Christian; and though a Christian for an hour or two only, he is now in paradise, where he has been during the last eighteen centuries and a half, and which he entered that same evening along with Jesus.

This interesting information we owe solely to the third Gospel. And from the account of the incident there given, we learn that the three crosses must have been very close to each other; for a conversation between the two thieves themselves and between them and Jesus is reported.

"If thou be Christ save thyself and us," said the impenitent thief to Jesus. "But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

This penitent thief must have been a person of very considerable refinement and cultivation judging from these observations of his. The conjecture that he was a robber, in the Barabbas sense of the word only, derives support from this incident. And yet his pious declaration that "we receive the due reward of our deeds," seems to show not only that he knew what his companion's deeds had been, but also that he regarded his own as quite deserving of crucifixion. And he knew also that Jesus had done "nothing amiss."

⁴⁴ The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

Religious penitence resembles gratitude, or rather a certain famous definition of gratitude, for it has an exceedingly lively expectation of favours to come. The effusive piety that issues from the condemned cell in our own day is a curious psychological study; and shows us that the heavenly bliss looked forward to by these interesting culprits is a much more active feature in the consciousness than any strictly penitential emotions.

In the usual Christian comments on this crucifixion incident we not only do not concur—we utterly dissent therefrom. Christian commentators indeed own that though this incident is pleasing—our own estimate of its pleasing and edifying qualities is a very moderate one—its doctrine of eleventh-hour repentance and, if the word is practicable, reform is a highly dangerous one. And so indeed it is. Any process, whether it be religious faith, or what else it be, which professes to liquidate the misdeeds of a lifetime in the last flickering moments of existence, is bad teaching. Last hour squaring up of life's wrongs is most pernicious morality; intellectually, it is not worth the trouble of a definition.

The fact that divine contiguity had such totally opposite effects upon this pair of thieves conveys, if we may use pious phraseology, a great lesson to us; or rather it seems to convey one, for what the lesson really is seems open to grave doubts. If the happy result in the one case illustrates the operation of divine grace upon a sinner, the disastrous result in the other shows, of course, the calamitous consequences of the absence of that saving grace. No doubt it is possible to regard the action of the happy thief as his own spontaneous doing; but whether that is sound theology is highly doubtful. Indeed the whole incident eminently and quickly leads us into the theological quagmire of freedom and election, and there we take leave of it.

From the fourth Gospel we learn that both these thieves were more unfortunate than Jesus, their crucifixion being more prolonged than his. To hasten their deaths both these men endured the agony of having their legs broken; an anguish which the earlier death of Jesus, it is pleasant to read, spared him. Little sympathy is found in Christian writings with these two other sufferers, even with the penitent one; though their sufferings must have been, so far as we can discover, quite as great as, nay greater than, those of Jesus himself.

An immense occurrence is now recorded by our author. At noon, after Jesus had been on the cross for a period of three hours, "there was darkness over all the land," which continued until the death of Jesus at three in the afternoon. Our first feeling on reading this is that it seems a pity this darkness did not come on sooner, for it would assuredly have saved Jesus from the scoffs of the passers-by and of the chief priests, scribes, and elders. What effect its actual appearance had upon those scoffers it would have been extremely interesting to learn, as also its effect upon the second thief. This darkness was clearly intended to be evidential and attesting in its nature. And if this darkness was dark enough, the chief priests, passers-by, and people of Jerusalem were indeed unimpressible if not duly impressed therewith; especially as it was corroborated by so many other portents.

"Darkness over all the land" is, it must be owned, a very elastic phrase; and it is curious to observe that modern commentators are generally as busy minimising this darkness as the older ones were in expanding and deepening it. In the third Gospel we read, "And there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened." The best scholars and best theologians differ—for Gospel matter and Gospel lucidity are well calculated to make men differ—as to what we should understand by "earth"; and also as to the degree and intensity, as well as the area, of this "darkness." The fact that it was not noticed in other countries, or at least not named by contemporary writers, is to us, we are bound to say, decisive that it did not extend to other countries than Judea. And such a parsimony, such a final confining of wonders and portents to Judea is, we must own, both humbling and disappointing. The sceptics—the shallow sceptics—who think this darkness was merely an ordinary April overcast, are suitably dealt with in a number of learned and closely-reasoned works.

An exceedingly "difficult" verse is now before us, Reader. Whilst upon the cross Jesus spoke several times; seven sayings altogether being found in the four Gospels. On placing those various sayings side by side, no connection either of thought, subject matter, or probable order of utterance is discernible. Which of these various sayings were the

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

last words of Jesus is a very doubtful point. It is clear however that the words here given, being uttered at the ninth hour, if not his absolutely last, were spoken by Jesus in the concluding moments of his earthly life.

The formidable and profound difficulty raised by these words from the ordinary Christian point of view has ever been acknowledged. To those who regard the Prophet of Nazareth as but a member of the human race only, the words offer no difficulty. They are indeed, when so thought of, eminently natural, and also eminently attestive to the sincerity and candour of Jesus.

The only possible faint approach to an explanation of these words from the orthodox standpoint is to have recourse to the perilous step, resorted to on some other occasions, of separating the two natures of Jesus, and thus to do temporarily what non-believers do permanently—that is, regard Jesus as human only. Some authorities indeed hold that it was the human nature of Jesus, and that alone, that was crucified on the cross, the divine nature being absent or in abeyance. Others condemn such a view as dangerous and unsound; but do not hesitate themselves to indulge in dealings with the two natures of Jesus that have not the merit of being intelligible, but which have the demerit of being very unedifying and very unpleasant also. How, and in what sense the Second Person of the Trinity could feel himself forsaken by the First, is a problem indeed. All attempts to “obviate” the difficulty raised by these final words of Jesus only serve to bring it out and to accentuate it.

A cry of despair thus seems to have been the last exclamation of Jesus. The dying words of those we have loved are peculiarly touching and have a singular fascination for us; though the value and significance once attached to them are seen to be not only ungrounded, but in the case of many kinds of death last words are seen to be often palpably non-significant and inharmonious. It has been suggested that this exclamation of Jesus was the half-conscious utterance due to pain and exhaustion; but the loud voice in which it was uttered seems scarcely in harmony with such a view.

This verse also raises once more the question what language Jesus usually spoke. This occasion certainly seems one when a person’s usual or native tongue would be used; if the terms be at all applicable to Jesus. The language here used was, as we see, not in any way addressed to or intended to enlighten bystanders.

It was a purely personal appeal to heaven. And it seems not a little singular that for such a purpose heaven's own language was not used. For we cannot think that any of our imperfect earthly tongues with their unsatisfactory grammars and erratic idioms are spoken in heaven; and least of all the particular one Jesus here used. Theologians may well regret that heaven's own language was not the one here made use of by Jesus.

Perhaps, Reader, we may be permitted, though it is somewhat of a digression, to refer to the other sayings spoken by Jesus during his crucifixion as recorded in the other Gospels.

The first and far the most important of these, is the one found in the third Gospel as spoken by Jesus at the beginning of his crucifixion. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The amiable and pleasing nature of the first part of this saying seems to have rendered Christian commentators entirely forgetful of the second part. The forgiveness needed for things done in ignorance cannot be great; in most cases it would be considered as not needed at all.

This admission of Jesus that those concerned in his death knew not what they did is a most important and significant one; especially in its bearing upon the supposed sin of non-belief in Jesus. We are aware many contend that these words of Jesus apply, and were meant to apply, to the Roman soldiers merely. We decline to accept such an exegesis. We believe the words apply, and were meant to apply, to all those concerned in Jesus' death; but whether that be so or not, we are quite certain that the words when so applied are entirely correct and just with reference to the Christian hypothesis.

The proposition that men could put to death, or even oppose, one whom they sincerely believed to be God, or the son of God, or a genuine messenger from heaven of any other kind even, is an obvious contradiction in terms. The innuendoes, and sometimes the little short of direct allegations, that the enemies of Jesus really believed him to be what Christians now declare he was, do those making them little credit. They are indeed dishonest; for they are ascribing to other human beings of a line of conduct which those making such an ascription know that neither they themselves nor any other undemented person could possibly adopt. For a man to consciously oppose what he sincerely believes to be religious truth, visibly represented by a manifestly more than natural personage,

obviously presupposes dementation. An attempt to put to death a being sincerely believed to be God or the Son of God implies dementation of the extremest type; such as would render actions of any kind entirely blameless.

But though there does not attach to those concerned in the death of Jesus, even to those chief priests, scribes, and elders who were the main spirits in effecting it, the absurd kind of guilt so often hinted at, that they were consciously seeking the death of God's Son, there does attach to them a sufficiently heavy weight of criminality. The instigators of the death of Jesus committed a great crime from the self-same motive that the like crime has so often been committed by Jesus' own priests, scribes, and elders. They allowed religious fanaticism, and spiritual intoxication to over-ride all feelings of justice, fairness, and mercy; and for that crime they deserve, as do all guilty of it, the detestation of all good men. And they deserved, and we hope—if they are perennial, conscious beings—they have received, a just and fair recompense of reward. For we once more and finally declare, Reader, that the easy, unearned, and unatoned sponging and erasure of wrongdoing sometimes taught by Jesus are to our mind as undeserving of admiration and commendation, though certainly not so deserving of detestation, as the frightful everlasting punishment for wrongdoing he at other times propounds.

Besides the promise made to the repentant thief already referred to, there is a third saying of Jesus on the cross given in the third Gospel. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." By many these are regarded as Jesus' last words; and it is almost expressly stated in that Gospel that they were so. Of these words it may be remarked that they are eminently human, and do not seem very congruous with ordinary Christian teachings of the relationship of Jesus to Jehovah. The commendation of the spirit of the Second Person of the Trinity into the hands of the First cannot be thought of with any satisfaction.

In the fourth Gospel there are also three other utterances of Jesus upon his cross recorded. The first consists of a few words to his mother and to a disciple, which we shall allude to a few verses further on in this chapter. Afterwards Jesus, we read, exclaimed, "I thirst!" an exclamation responded to by the offer of vinegar and hyssop, which Jesus, unlike his previous refusal, accepted; soon after which act he declared, "It is finished," which,

as with another phrase in the third Gospel, are almost definitely stated to have been the final words of Jesus.

It is not possible to form much conception of the people or

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard *that*, said, *This man calleth for Elias.*

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

concourse at this time present around the three crosses. It seems natural to suppose that the three hours' darkness must have alarmed and driven away almost all previously present; and one almost wonders that such a portent did not impel to an attempted liberation of Jesus. It is to be feared the "darkened" Sun spoken of in another Gospel is very much a figure of speech. Half-measures of such a

kind as this darkness evidently was are much more unsatisfactory than no measures of the kind at all.

The pathetic reproach addressed to heaven by Jesus led some of those present to think that Jesus was calling upon Elias to come and save him. "Let us see," said those present, "whether Elias will come to save him,"—the darkness having now presumably passed away. Had the saving of Jesus been possible in the sense of being permissible, the effecting of that object by means of Elias would not have been worthy the occasion. That prophet indeed seems to have been a very much cleaner and sweeter person than most Biblical characters, but he was not worthy of so great an errand as the saving of Jesus. Nothing less than the twelve legions of angels suggested by Jesus himself would have been a fitting machinery for so auspicious, and so much to be desired, a purpose.

The words of this final cry of Jesus are not recorded. The

50 ¶ Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

phrase "cried again with a loud voice" almost leads us to think the words were the same as before, though of this we cannot be certain.

Many think this cry was one of the phrases found in the other Gospels.

"Yielded up the ghost." This expression is not without its difficulties to those who hold the theory of the double nature of Jesus. The co-existence, sometimes blended, sometimes separated, in the physical form of Jesus of the Second Person of the Trinity and a human soul offers of itself a sufficiently perplexing problem. How the two existences should be thought of after leaving that body is beyond the power of the most vigorous imagination to conceive or picture.

The Christian scheme of redemption was now accomplished. The anger of Jehovah against our human race, which necessitated this plan, was now appeased. It had remained for some thousands of years unsatisfied, though, so far as Judea was concerned, somewhat mollified by a system of animal sacrifice. Now, the divine wrath against our species was pacified: the sacrifice our author has just described having finally and completely propitiated it.

It would ill become us to attempt to state what this memorable plan of salvation really implies: for even theologians have, ever since the event itself, been and yet are at cross purposes as to its true and its practical import; their views ranging all the way from the doctrine that the death of Jesus accomplishes the salvation of a small fraction of our species termed the elect only, to the doctrine that it finally effects the salvation of all of us, and of all beings whatever, not excluding even that malign source of all mischief who, in the form of a serpent, brought sin and death upon our race.

Whatever the effect, the happy and soothing effect, the sacrifice of Jesus had upon the king of heaven, it had not that effect in any way on earth. Sin and death continued unhappily as before. And if Jehovah still took the same interest in earthly affairs as before, the vexation and aggravation he experienced from human folly must have been at least as great as ever. The thousand years that followed the visit of Jesus to us was the gloomiest and most ignoble period in all history: Christianity, as then understood, or misunderstood, and in the latter part the huge rival creed Jesus so mysteriously permitted to arise against his own, giving between them to that long period the well-deserved name of the dark ages.

The effect of Christianity in the world in these later ages is a debated point, as the many diverse ways in which Christianity is and has been "understood" might well render it. With the admitted aid of mental freedom, and the science, the discoveries, and all the enlightenments that have come from that freedom, Christianity, say Christians, has done great things for us. Alas! there are not wanting those who are obliged to say that it is not through, but in spite of, Christianity these blessed things have, in the main, been achieved.

Leaving such problems to those fitted to, and willing to deal with them, we cannot help observing, Reader, with what remarkable rapidity the latter part of this Gospel history was carried out.

Only a week elapsed between the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the young colt, and his entry into paradise on the afternoon of the crucifixion. But rapid as this appears to be, it is as nothing compared to the amazing celerity with which the latter part of the proceedings was accomplished. From the time when Jesus left the upper room of the house of the man with the pitcher to his return to paradise less than twenty-four hours elapsed. During those twenty-one or two hours Jesus had undergone what is termed the agony in the garden; he had undergone five trials; had been condemned to death; and had spent six hours on the cross. Truly, Reader, this is very astonishing. And yet it is very satisfactory also; for the speed with which the Christian scheme of redemption was effected is, in our humble judgment, the best feature that scheme possesses.

At the same time, we are bound to own that this wonderful and pleasing compression of the sufferings of Jesus into less than one single day, makes it impossible for us to greatly enter into or appreciate the affecting writing concerning the suffering Saviour we have so plentifully met with.

We sincerely lament the death and the sufferings, short as these latter were, of Jesus. But the calls of Christian piety upon us to enter into an abnormal spirit of pity and woe as we ponder upon the foregoing narrative are fruitless. We are obliged to own that many another martyrdom has touched us far more deeply than this of Jesus.

Indeed as we here pause, and think of the scene set before us at this particular point, our thoughts are entirely with the two poor creatures still hanging on their crosses, and about to undergo a further anguish Jesus so happily escaped. It is true they may have done some misdeed or other; but we are quite certain that in their lacerated hands and feet there were quivering nerves also.

We have too to own, Reader, that though we have tried to keep it out, there has sometimes flitted into our remembrance during the study of this chapter a certain sketch given a short time back by Jesus of a "judgment" day at which he will preside, and that then our sympathy has for the time being been painfully chilled. Furnaces that never grow cold feel to us to dwarf a few hours' crucifixion.

Contemplated from a natural standpoint the sins of the world were quickly sponged out. Many are the individual sins that have

been expiated more slowly and painfully than were the aggregate sins of our species. Mysticism, of course, may ascribe whatever extent of suffering to the martyrdom of Jesus it may think fit. This course is often adopted, and the sufferings of Jesus declared to have been very great; but any authority for such a view is not to be found in, but is excluded by, these Gospels. Those who allege that Jesus' sufferings were vastly greater than they appear to have been, may think the supposition one honouring to Jesus; it is a point that must be left with them. Pietists are here treading on queer ground, as pietists, both Christian and otherwise, so often do.

The sufferings undergone by Jesus offer nothing like a parallel to those many men have had to endure. The fate even of many of his own followers has been far more severe than that of Jesus himself. The long-sustained ill-usage and persecution, the prolonged imprisonment, the cruel torture, and the burning, oftentimes with green faggots, that have fallen to the lot of many of those followers, make the fate of Jesus himself seem mild indeed.

And when we think of and contrast the consciousness of such sufferers with that of Jesus, this consideration becomes greatly enhanced. By hypothesis, Jesus knew everything. Anxiety and doubt—such elements in human misery—were entirely absent with him. Other martyrs might believe they were right, but misgivings are never absent from even the strongest human faith. With Jesus everything was knowledge and certainty. He knew when eating his passover that in twenty hours his sufferings would be ended, and he himself once again in paradise, possessed of supreme and everlasting power. The real conditions of misery were entirely excluded in the case of Jesus. For what real agitation could the trials he endured before the Sanhedrim and before Pilate produce to such a blissful consciousness? The delicious knowledge possessed by Jesus must have rendered his whole earthly existence supremely happy. The six hours upon the cross are the only conceivable real suffering Jesus experienced, and even in that point his remarkably early death rendered his sufferings mild when compared with those of most other crucified ones.

The day of Jesus' death is commemorated by Christians under the title of Good Friday. This name is expressive of their view that the work of that day upon the whole and in the main was

a good work. The martyrdom of Jesus was in their view a great crime, but a happy and glorious event. If that crime had not been perpetrated, its non-occurrence would have been an appalling disaster. Never was there so felicitous a misdeed as the crucifixion of Jesus. It only remains, Reader, for us to record that to these views, save that the martyrdom of Jesus was a great crime, we are unable to accord any concurrence whatever.

Our author now records a number of other portents which, like

51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

the darkness that had covered the earth, but now passed away, also marked the death of Jesus. And of the wonders that he here narrates as attending the death of Jesus we are compelled to say that, like those he recorded as attending the birth of Jesus, they are unsatisfactory in the last degree.

Such wonders are clearly adduced in both the case of the birth and of the death of Jesus as

vouchers offered by heaven; as attestations given for the purpose of bearing witness to men of the true nature and import of those two events. So far, so good; for the offering of marvels and portents in corroboration of the gravity of those two occurrences shows the reasonableness and appropriateness of the natural expectation of men that such occurrences would be, and should be, clearly and unmistakably borne witness to. Granting the position thus admitted that the death of Jesus and its character should be testified to by appropriate tokens; that such a method of marking and confirming the event in the minds of men was becoming and desirable, then it surely follows that such tokens should be adequate and unmistakable, and such as to preclude the possibility or shadow of a doubt. For ambiguous or dubious proofs for such a purpose are clearly as discreditable to heaven as they are worthless to men.

Of the vouchers displayed at the birth of Jesus we have elsewhere given our thoughts. What are the attestations here given as bearing testimony to the death of Jesus? They are four in number. Darkness over the earth, or over Judea, for a space of three hours in the middle of the day; an earthquake; the re-appearance in Jerusalem of the re-animated bodies of dead men; and the rending in two pieces of the veil of the temple.

Of the first of these we at once say that if the three hours' mid-

day darkness was of the degree of intensity necessary and requisite for the purpose in question, it was a portent quite worthy of the occasion. If such a darkness prevailed over the earth, as it must have done if it proceeded from a darkened Sun, such a voucher was in every way a fitting and becoming one. And even if it prevailed over Judea only, though such limitation was an ignoble and miserable parsimony, still to Judea it was a full and appropriate attestation.

But is it possible in face of known facts for us to credit the reality of such a darkness? If such an alarming and prodigious darkness prevailed over the earth, how can we account for its entire absence from any records save these Gospels, or rather three even of them only? And if the phenomenon extended to Judea only, the difficulty is only slightly lessened. Jerusalem at the time was crowded with pilgrims come up from all parts of the world to the passover feast. How comes it that tidings of so amazing a prodigy did not find their way all around by means of these home returning pilgrims? We seek for a trace of such things in vain.

If, on the other hand, this three hours' darkness was of a dim, partial, or ambiguous character, for evidential purposes it was entirely valueless. And what conceivable purpose can there ever be in tendering to men wonders and portents of an inconclusive, tantalizing, and doubtful nature?

An earthquake does not seem a very fitting form of testimony to the death of Jesus, unless terror pure and simple was its object. Earthquakes, unhappily even on a vast scale, are ordinary occurrences, and could not, like a dark midday Sun, be classed as a marvel at all. Besides, this was clearly an extremely mild shock. It is omitted even from the other three Gospels, and is found nowhere but in our author. What evidential value could so meagre a phenomenon possibly possess either to the death of Jesus or to anything whatever?

The re-appearance of the re-animated bodies of certain dead folks in Jerusalem is a portent in the strictest and fullest sense of the word. The evidential and attestatory value of this portent depends upon whom the favoured spectators of this surprising and agreeable or disagreeable phenomenon were. They appeared "unto many" is the characteristic information furnished to us.

Who these "saints" were has been the subject of much pious debate. There had of course now been sufficient time since the

promulgation of Christianity for there being many dead Christians, though it scarcely seems possible there could have been many in Jerusalem itself or its neighbourhood. Hence the term "saints" has received in many quarters a much wider interpretation.

How long these resuscitated saints continued in the holy city and whether they met with death again has also been discussed. Many sedate Christians, who take part in many an equally bootless controversy, censure such discussions as profitless and useless, if not indeed even worse. But they forget that when a picture is presented to the human mind, to follow it out is natural, and not easily resistible. It seems almost certain these revived saints remained but a short time on earth; and quickly returned to their sleep, their graves, or their places in paradise. For in the history of early Christianity after the death of Jesus, given in the book of Acts, and elsewhere, we meet with none of them, and with no allusion to them even.

This striking portent is also omitted from the other three Gospels. It thus rests upon our author's testimony alone; in this respect resembling that startling massacre recorded at the beginning of his work, which one would have thought would have arrested the attention of other historians and stirred the very nation itself.

The remaining portent—the rending in two of the veil of the temple—is a very small one in itself, but supposed to be full of symbolical significance; and, according to a well-known critical theory, this latter significance has given rise to the "incident" itself. This rending of the veil has the corroboration of the next two Gospels; which, if the three first Gospels are regarded as entirely independent documents—a not very easy theory to hold—may count for something.

The torn veil of the temple seems to have had no effect whatever upon the chief priests, who would have, in a natural sense, been first aware of the fact. What view of this fact, or alleged fact, the successors of these chief priests, whom we have the very distinguished honour of still having amongst us, may hold we do not know. It is easy to imagine what a great shock the exposed holy of holies must have given to these celebrated predecessors of the present esteemed chief priests of Israel.

Such, Reader, were the wonders vouchsafed by heaven in recognition of the death of Jesus. The admitted becomingness of offering

testimony to that event is the only satisfactory feature these portents possess. The two portents out of the four which alone had any real appropriateness to the occasion are found—as are also the two others—and found only, in these Gospels; and even found in three, and in one, of these Gospels respectively alone.

What a pity it seems, Reader, that those twelve legions of angels named by Jesus did not at this time appear. They could not, it is true, come to liberate Jesus, because that would have frustrated the Christian plan of redemption. But after that plan was thus fully carried out there was nothing to prevent that glorious sight; which for purposes of corroboration to friends and enemies alike, and to those who were neither the one nor the other, would have been worth more than any number of hours of semi-darkness and any number of small earthquakes. Such an appearance of those angels in Jerusalem would have been an event welcome from every point of view and to all parties alike. For Jesus and his faith it would have been a complete and crowning attestation and triumph; to his enemies it would have been confutation and yet enlightenment as convincing as unexpected; of heaven it would have been a noble vindication; and to all mankind a magnificent assurance of the new religion's truth.

But they did not come; and Christian faith has to cling to and rest upon the meagre marvels meagrely attested here set before us.

Amid their complete general failure, the crucifixion marvels

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

had, at least, one successful result. They satisfied the centurion in charge of the crosses and his companions, as we presume “they that were with him” means, that Jesus was the Son of God. What produced this very satisfactory conviction in the minds of this centurion

and his companions was, that they “saw the earthquake and those things that were done.” The two next Gospels record the conversion of the centurion somewhat curiously. The second states, “And when the centurion which stood over against him saw that he so cried out and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.” The third states, “When the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this man was a righteous man.”

When we reflect upon this conviction of the centurion and his comrades, it is impossible to help regretting that the chief priests,

scribes, and elders, and other scoffers did not remain until the coming of these marvels, or that these portents did not arrive a little sooner. For had not these men been calling upon Jehovah to recognize his son? No doubt the darkness and the earthquake would be as perceptible to the priests and other mockers elsewhere in Jerusalem as if they had remained at Golgotha. But there is always a great deal in a timely coincidence; and we think few readers will be able to help regretting that the earthquake and the darkness did not come on an hour or two earlier when the chief priests and others were indulging in jeers and in appeals to their God.

This centurion and his companions were thus satisfied that they had been crucifying the Son of God. Alas! Reader, with that wonderful absence of what should naturally follow things which is the really miraculous element in these Gospels, we hear no more of this centurion and his comrades.

The men of that time, as portrayed to us in these Gospels, offer to readers thereof a totally unintelligible problem. Who can help the natural, nay irresistible, feeling after reading this verse that this centurion and his companions must perforce have become zealous Christians, proclaiming to the world the momentous truth so mightily impressed upon themselves? And what a testimony theirs would have been; a hundredfold more efficacious than that of the personal friends and previous disciples of Jesus—which latter, is unfortunately, the only testimony to these immense occurrences we possess.

The presence of a number of women who were believers in or sympathizers with Jesus at the crucifixion is declared in all the Gospels. A number of women addressed by Jesus as "Daughters of Jerusalem" had followed him from the prætorium to Golgotha.

55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

The women here named by our author as present at Golgotha had come up with or followed Jesus from Galilee. He specially

names three: Mary Magdalene; Mary the mother of James and Joses, who it appears was Jesus' aunt—"his mother's sister," as stated in the last Gospel—and "the mother of Zebedee's children," the same who had besought for the two sons of thunder the two best seats in the kingdom of heaven.

In the next Gospel these same three women are also specially named as being at Golgotha, and we there read of them, "who also when he was in Galilee followed him and ministered unto him." It is pleasant to read that Jesus thus received the delicate ministrations and comforts at the hands of feminine friends and relatives that do so much to smooth and make life pleasant. The lament of Jesus on a certain occasion that he had not where to lay his head must, we think, be regarded as an exceptional instance, the cause and purpose of which cannot now be ascertained.

Jesus' aunt, and the mother of two of his disciples, must have been elderly women. Of Mary of Magadan, or Magdala, here mentioned for the first time in this Gospel, all we know with certainty is, that Jesus had cast no less than seven devils out of her. She is usually considered the woman termed "a sinner" in the third Gospel, and on that account her name has since been given to a lamentable section of her own sex, though not without many and, in our opinion, very just protests from many Christian writers. But probabilities, as we so repeatedly see, struggle vainly against supposed edifying theories in religious matters. The power of Jesus to elevate and sanctify the most depraved, thus exemplified, makes the supposition of Mary of Magadan having once been a sinner, one that even Christian rationalism will not easily shake.

In the second Gospel we read after the mention of these three women as having come with Jesus from Galilee, "and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem." We own, Reader, we feel here to be getting unpleasantly near the boundary line, not easy to define, which separates two well-known qualities. It would have been much pleasanter, and a hundredfold more satisfactory, to have read that Jesus had been accompanied to Jerusalem by many of the once blind, once lame, once leprous, once sick and diseased men, who, thanks to him, were blind, and lame, and lepers, and sick, no longer.

In the third Gospel we read, "And all his acquaintance and the women that followed him from Galilee stood afar off, beholding these things." The phrase, "all his acquaintance," is so wide and so vague that even Christian commentators do not venture on any explication of it.

On this subject the fourth Gospel has information of its own to the effect that Jesus' mother was also present at the crucifixion.

Why the three first Gospels, which name the two women given in the fourth Gospel as being with the mother of Jesus, omit all mention of her, is one of the minor but exceptionally significant perplexities of these Gospels, to the solution of which many ingenuities have been brought; ingenuities which, as might have been expected, vie with each other in pointless insipidity, and unhappily in that alone.

According to that fourth Gospel, the mother of Jesus, together with her sister and Mary Magdalene, stood at one period of the crucifixion quite close to Jesus' cross. And with these three women was also the disciple whom Jesus loved—understood to be John himself. Jesus spoke to his mother, saying, "Woman, behold thy son!" and then to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!" from which hour that disciple took her, we read, to his own home. Whether this home was in Jerusalem or in Galilee is not known.

How long Jesus' mother survived her famous son also remains unknown. She is named at the beginning of the book of Acts; but though that record extends to a long subsequent period, no further mention of her is to be found. She would at this time be advanced in years.

The sisters of Jesus are here, as elsewhere, conspicuously absent. The absence of Jesus' brethren, who had, we are told, no faith in him, does not surprise us. It is, of course, possible to suppose that the brethren and sisters of Jesus were amongst "his acquaintance"; but the supposition is not a very probable one.

The body of Jesus seems to have remained some hours on the cross. As the following day happened to be the Jewish Sabbath, it could not be permitted to remain there until then. How the dead body of Jesus was disposed of is here narrated. It is also recorded in the other Gospels, and with a greater degree of unanimity than any other incident given in the four accounts.

57 When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:

58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

Amongst the disciples of Jesus—but a secret one, for fear of "the Jews," we are told in the fourth Gospel—was a certain Joseph, of the city of Arimathea. He was a rich man and, according to the next Gospel, a member of the Sanhedrim. His courage seems to have been somewhat braced by the death of Jesus, for he "went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus." We read in the next gospel that Pilate, on hearing Joseph's request,

marvelled that Jesus was dead so soon; but calling the converted centurion to inquire, found that such was the case, whereupon he complied with Joseph's petition.

From the fourth Gospel we learn that in the discharge of these

59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

pious offices to the body of Jesus, Joseph was assisted by Nicodemus, another timid soul, who secretly believed in Jesus. There is something odd in thinking that the body of Jesus should have fallen to the disposal of two such timorous followers as these. Our author, Peter, and the other mighty apostles,

who could themselves raise the dead, do not seem to have been willing to undertake the duty discharged by Nicodemus and Joseph.

Jesus must have been pleased, even though foreknowing all about it, on looking down and beholding the kindly services bestowed upon his body by these two timid believers; and if we may be permitted to point a Gospel lesson, as other commentators so oftendo, we think Christians might learn from this to be more forbearing with timorous believers, who are slow to come forward and take the prominent characters of declared and professed disciples.

From the last Gospel we also learn that the sepulchre where the body of Jesus was placed was very near to the place of his crucifixion. This sepulchre was a new tomb made by Joseph for himself; it was cut out of a rock, and was situated in a garden adjoining Golgotha.

In the acts here ascribed to Joseph as personal, such as "he wrapped," "he rolled," it is plain that Joseph must have had even more assistance than could be afforded by Nicodemus personally; unless supernatural aid be pre-supposed. How the bodies of the two fellow-sufferers of Jesus were disposed of we do not know. It is to be feared that not many spices were applied to their broken limbs. Is it wrong, Reader, to express a word of pity for even the one who had not gone to Paradise? He had expiated his sins in a more painful manner than that in which the sins of our entire race had been expunged; and we cannot think there can be any wrong in hoping that his fate in pandemonium may be a relatively mild one.

Having wrapped the body of Jesus in a clean linen cloth, and placed therein a hundredweight of myrrh and aloes, Joseph and

his companion laid their precious freight in the sepulchre, which they closed by rolling a great stone to the door. Whatever conception of this "great stone" we may form, it is impossible to help a feeling that such modes of—and regulations, if the word be usable, as to—burial here displayed seem to be unpleasantly lax.

In another respect, however, the burial of Jesus here described is much pleasanter than our modern methods. There was none of that encasing of the body in hard wood, or even sometimes lead, still unhappily perpetrated in these days. And though before omnipotence all obstacles vanish, or rather are non-existent, it is manifest how much more convenient for the purposes of a resurrection the burial here described would be than a burial in the manner current with ourselves.

The object of these two women, who had probably watched the proceedings of Joseph and Nicodemus, is usually supposed to have been partly a natural and affectionate solicitude to see the last of Jesus and partly to note where he was placed, so that they might, after the approaching Sabbath day was over, return and anoint his body with spices and ointment. There thus appears to have been no objection in law or in sentiment to reopening a sepulchre and rehandling a dead body.

Whether these women knew that Jesus had declared his intention of rising again on the third day is not clear. According to the fourth Gospel, written by the younger of the two sons of Thunder, the disciples themselves did not know that intention of Jesus. How often our author had heard Jesus distinctly state that intention we have already seen; and from the next verse it appears the fact was even publicly known, or at least was known to the chief priests and the Pharisees.

The object of our author in using the cumbrous phrase, "the next day that followed the day of the preparation," seems to have been to avoid the use of the word Sabbath. For the coming of these chief priests and Pharisees to Pilate on the Sabbath is an extreme improbability, which our author was evidently conscious of.

Overcoming—to our great astonishment—their profound scruples upon the subject, the chief priests and Pharisees come to have a Sabbath interview with Pilate.

61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

62 ¶ Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

63 [Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was

yet alive. After three days I will rise again.

If this be credible, it shows us how strong the suspicion of a coming resurrection or, at any rate, of a vacant sepulchre—which the knowledge of the marvelously early death of Jesus would not tend to lessen—must have been in the minds of these successors of Moses.

It also shows us that the portents which had accompanied the crucifixion of Jesus had not had the slightest impression upon these men. Men who had beheld the darkened Sun, had felt the quaking earth, and found the veil of the temple rent in twain, and their own holy of holies thus exposed, were entirely unmoved, and come to Pilate to calmly urge upon him precautionary measures with regard to that “deceiver.” We can only say that with ourselves such a record is unreceivable.

The fact that corroboration of that darkened Sun is sought in vain in any observer or record of the time—a fact which would extinguish the credibility of the allegation to any receptivity other than the omnivorous religious one—is not a heavier impeachment of the objective reality of that asserted occurrence than the utter non-effect upon men here ascribed to that huge portent.

“Sir.” We have here, Reader, another illustration of the judicious, if not judicial, tact with which our translators discharged their duty. For the word here rendered into Sir is none other than the very one applied to Jesus himself throughout these Gospels, and when so applied rendered by our translators into the sonorous word “Lord.” The delicate and even profound connotations that have gathered round that word “lord” are a striking instance of a well-known fact of a general kind. The substitution of Sir for Lord as addressed to Jesus in these Gospels would often, especially in a devotional sense, be simply disastrous; though how much the word “lord” and its present associations read into and add to the original is obvious enough.

The value of resonant words and sonorous phrases is well enough known in other subjects than religion, though eloquence of the type very dependent thereupon is happily now appraised at about its real worth. In religion, words and phrases of the kind mentioned still retain not a little potency. The substitution of the flowing word Calvary for the guttural Golgotha, which our translators have not scrupled to make in the third Gospel, to the great benefit of many a pulpit outpour, and to the still greater advantage of much pious literature, is one example out of the many showing us the known

value of improved and resonant words for religious purposes. The greatly improved word *Jehovah* is another conspicuous illustration.

“We remember.” This verse has greatly puzzled Christian expositors, who usually account for the knowledge thus shown by these chief priests and Pharisees by suggesting that they had gathered or suspected the real and “inner” meaning of the insipid metaphor about destroying and building the temple in three days which Jesus had used and which had been used against him at his first trial, or that they had at last deciphered the sign of the prophet *Jonah* given to the Pharisees. The words here quoted, however, by these interviewers are specific and distinct. “After three days I will rise again.” Many of these priests and Pharisees, we must remember, had seen and conversed with Jesus, and it would almost seem from this that Jesus had spoken to them the words here given.

“That deceiver.” Many commentators find themselves much shocked by the application to their beloved Lord of a word so plain and so harsh as the one here used. We are no advocates of harsh words, which are seldom just ones and still more rarely wise ones. But Christians should remember that their beloved master was a great user of them ; and that he had applied to these very chief priests epithets with which this, here applied by them to him, is not to be compared.

These chief priests and Pharisees requested Pilate to see that the sepulchre of Jesus was made sure until the third day ; suggesting that the disciples would probably come and remove the body of their master in the night, and thus fulfil his prophecy ; the consequences of which they point out to Pilate. The disciples here alluded to are probably the eleven, of whom these chief priests and Pharisees had clearly a not very high opinion ; an estimate probably based upon their knowledge of the particular apostle they had had certain dealings with, and thence by a certain well-known but often very fallacious maxim, inferring the character of his associates. Probably, also, they had heard of Peter’s attitude, and they doubtless knew of the unheroic flight of the others. The apostles could scarcely stand very high in anyone’s estimation at this time. The salt of the earth had certainly temporarily lost its

64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead : so the last error shall be worse than the first.

savour, never a very remarkable one. But all readers of these Gospels will feel how impossible and undeserved the insinuation here made against the eleven really was; an insinuation our author must have resented, or perhaps despised, as pertaining to himself.

Pilate—who seems to have been equally unaffected by the crucifixion wonders—replied to these chief priests and Pharisees somewhat impatiently. Nor can we wonder at this. He had been importuned by these men into consenting to an act with which he had no sympathy; and the religious views of the Jews must have been as tedious to him as the religious ideas and feelings of the Eastern peoples are to the Western governors who now occupy very similar positions.

Pilate told them they had—or might have—a watch, and then bade them go their way and make the sepulchre of Jesus as sure as they could.

It is, we think, impossible to frame a conception of the scene described in this verse, and try to realize and follow it out, without finding the preservation of gravity no easy matter. We have to think of the chief priests and representatives of Jehovah on earth sealing up the stone at the door of the sepulchre which contained the dead body of Jehovah's only son; Jehovah and Jesus himself meantime looking down upon the scene from paradise, with feelings which, if it be true that we are made in Jehovah's image, it is perhaps possible, though but faintly, for us to imagine.

It is very noticeable that we are not told if, before the stone was sealed, it had been ascertained that the body of Jesus was in the sepulchre. For certainly the first of the two nights it was to remain there seems the more likely to have been the one selected for the realization of the suspicion entertained by these authorities.

65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: Go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

crucifixion wonders—replied to these chief priests and Pharisees somewhat impatiently.

66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

described in this verse, and try to realize and follow it out, without finding the preservation of gravity no easy matter. We have to think

MATTHEW XXVIII.

THE final stage of our author's history is now reached, Reader. Jesus has been arrested, tried, condemned, and put to death. In this short concluding chapter our author records that Jesus re-animated his body, arose therewith from his sepulchre, and appeared to a number of his friends and believers, and—we much regret to say—to them alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

1 Christ's resurrection is declared by an angel to the women.

9 He himself appeareth unto them. 11 The high priests give the soldiers money to say that he was stolen out of his sepulchre.

12 Christ appeareth to his disciples, 19 and sendeth them to baptize and teach all nations.

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

If the crucifixion of Jesus actually produced death—which crucifixion did not always do, and that six hours' crucifixion of a person of Jesus' time of life should produce that result might well cause Pilate to marvel—and if, notwithstanding that death, Jesus re-appeared

bodily, we are obviously face to face with an event of a most momentous kind.

The reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation-stone of supernatural Christianity. If Jesus died and yet rose again from the dead, his personal claims and his religion imperatively demand our faith as being duly attested and demonstrated. If, on the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was not a real objective occurrence, then the supernatural claims and the system built upon that alleged event collapse altogether. What may be termed natural Christianity, which some people think is of much value, is indeed independent of the resurrection or otherwise of Jesus. The moral teachings of the Prophet of Nazareth—for he never attempted enlightenment on any other branches of human knowledge, but rather gave, as we have seen, some very unpleasant looking concurrences to current ignorance—would still remain if this chapter were dissipated and obliterated. And though we are unable to accord to those moral teachings either on the score of originality or of intrinsic value the estimation that even some non-Christians have accorded to them, but have had to strongly dissent from no small portion of them, yet we quite agree that natural Christianity would find and deserve a notable place in ethical teachings and records.

It may first of all be observed that the purported resurrection of

a dead person was at this time no novelty. So far from the account of such an event being unique, it was as a matter of fact, somewhat tediously common. Resurrection is a prodigy liberally met with in ancient histories, and also in modern histories of pre-scientific times.

How often Jesus himself had revived the dead these Gospels assure us and describe to us. How he had also bestowed upon the twelve—now, alas! eleven only—the power to freely call the dead to life again we have seen; and there can, we suppose, be no doubt that our author himself had often performed this exploit. So also doubtless had his colleagues, though he assures us as regards some of these raisers of the dead, that they “doubted” concerning their risen master; on what ground or grounds he does not, unhappily, state.

We have read how the resurrection of Jesus was accompanied or followed by that of many others who left their graves and appeared in Jerusalem. The easy profuseness and the lavishness with which the raising of the dead is dealt with in these Gospels greatly detract from the effectiveness of the achievement as applied to Jesus himself.

Ancient Biblical history—though reference of any kind whatever to the dead is very scanty therein—also furnishes us with some cases of rising from the dead. The scriptures of other religions are embellished with the prodigy in varying quantity. Nor is even secular history by any means void of this marvel.

After the time of Jesus, the apostles wrought this exploit, and in the case of Peter, we are sorry to say, its converse also. Raising the dead is common in church annals during the first centuries, and indeed continues to be so throughout the middle ages; some of these occurrences being related with great detail and with abundance of “life-like” touches. Acceptance or rejection of this very copious class of post-apostolic miracles forms indeed one of the lines of cleavage in Christendom.

The raising of the dead, like all other prodigies, becomes rarer and rarer after the dawn of science and the scientific spirit, and like all other miracles has entirely ceased and is not now in operation. We are so strongly averse to dogmatism that we are not unaware that we may here be thought guilty of it; but with all deference to those who assure us of the continued re-appearance of the dead, sometimes even “materialized,” we feel no compunction in letting our statement remain unqualified. As we have elsewhere

stated, the cessation of the return of the dead is in our judgment a matter of satisfaction. For deplorable as the premature death of the good may be, the return of the dead to us again, or our return to our survivors, is eminently undesirable.

Whatever other qualities, then, this account of the resurrection may possess, it certainly does not possess that of novelty, nor yet even that of rarity. This account of the resurrection of Jesus has many analogies both friendly and rival. It is quite true it does not follow that because accounts of this prodigy are so plentiful, and from the nature of the case so largely mutually exclusive, that therefore no account of such an occurrence can be true. Such an inference would clearly not be a sound one.

But the antecedent improbability of a dead person's coming to life again is admittedly immense, and admittedly cannot be overcome except by the very weightiest and most unexceptionable evidence; evidence which nowhere exists, an approach to which even nowhere exists.

And it is at this point that the fact of our meeting with so many unreceivable accounts of this prodigy exerts its immense force and significance. It shows us that there must have been at work a widespread and fruitful motive causing men to make and causing men to accept narratives of such a kind; a motive or motives easily perceived. To which also it must undoubtedly be added that striking resuscitations of the apparently dead may very often have been an honest basis of many such narratives.

The accounts of the resurrection of Jesus given to us in the four Gospels, instead of being the best and clearest, are, in point of fact, the most unsatisfactory portion of the entire Gospel history. A collation of the four accounts of the event reveals a medley of incongruities which resists all the attempts of harmonists not only to blend, but even to reconcile.

All the four descriptions of the resurrection of Jesus, or more correctly of the way in which that resurrection was discovered, begin by declaring that the memorable event was first disclosed to Mary Magdalene, or to her and other women with her, who had come before daylight in the morning of the first day of the week to the sepulchre of Jesus. In one account Mary Magdalene alone is named; in this there are, as we see, two women; in the next Gospel there are three; and in the remaining one an unspecified number of women.

It is easy, and it is true, to say that these variations concerning the number of these women are technically not absolutely irreconcilable. But are they creditable, we will not say to celestial inspiration, but even to any historians possessed, as these four writers are said to have been, of accurate and in two cases personal knowledge of the event? Who does not feel that such varying versions are thoroughly unsatisfactory? Besides, the account which gives Mary Magdalene only as present is not in keeping in its sequel with the supposition of other women being with her, the whole structure of the narrative being discordant with, and indeed excluding, such a supposition.

The object of this early visit of this one, or these two, or three, or more women to the sepulchre of Jesus is stated in two of the Gospels to have been to anoint the body of Jesus; and yet one of those Gospels declares that these women were quite aware that Jesus would rise again this third day, having been told so by Jesus himself in Galilee. If these women really had been told this by Jesus, and had faith in the prediction, we must say that the sorrow and the solicitude of these women assume a very anomalous and not very pleasing aspect. Instead, too, of needing to anoint his body, they must have rather expected to find Jesus already arisen on their arriving this third-day morning at his sepulchre.

The resurrection of Jesus, strictly speaking, is not recorded. At

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

what time this same morning he re-animated his dead body and came out of his sepulchre therewith is left to our conjectures. Some think this verse records both the time and method of Jesus' exit from his tomb, and that

the proceedings of this verse had transpired before the arrival of the women. But the natural interpretation, strengthened by the use of our author's very favourite word *behold*, of this verse and the preceding one, undoubtedly is that this great earthquake, the descent of the angel, the rolling back of the stone, and the angel's sitting thereupon, took place at or after the arrival of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at the sepulchre.

"A great earthquake." As with the preceding one, this "great" earthquake is unmentioned by the other three Gospels. How they could pass over two such occurrences in total silence is not easy to understand. The earthquakes, like the dreams, of the Gospel history are known to our author and to him only. We do not

think either the one or the other at all improves his narrative. They are both machinery which, in addition to being painfully obvious and poverty-stricken as such, do no honour to this record.

The purpose of this great earthquake is not discernible; what follows it being not in keeping with nor suitably consequent to such a huge convulsion. Had the purpose of this earthquake been to strike terror into Pilate, Caiaphas, and the priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, we could have felt some little sympathy with it. But there is every reason to believe that none of those worthies were conscious either of this great quaking or its predecessor.

The descent of the angel of the Lord from heaven would be a fine and pleasing sight, the witnessing of which these two women are greatly to be envied. There are few features of these Gospels more to be regretted than the paucity and the privacy of angelic appearances. There is, indeed, in these Gospels, one special type of angel visits not to be wished for; which indeed stirs our indignation rather than our admiration. We are told in the last Gospel that close to the sheep market at Jerusalem there was a certain pool around which "lay a great multitude of impotent folk of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." A more offensive mockery of human calamity could not be imagined. The thought of this angel's troubling of the water which left only sufficient virtue to cure one of these poor creatures—the one who first stepped into the troubled waters, which means the one best able to do so, in other words, the least afflicted, the least deserving one; the thought of the disappointment and the despair of the remainder of this great afflicted multitude, and the thought of such celestial trifling, justly stir our indignation. The visits of this pool angel have happily now ceased, and this institution is no longer in operation.

"Rolled back the stone from the door." Some think this was the occasion and the means of Jesus' coming out of the sepulchre; a view much dissented from by others. Jesus, it may be remarked, is represented as corporeal and as incorporeal after his resurrection in a very confusing way. We read in this Gospel how these two women "held him by the feet" to worship him. In another, Jesus, to assure his disciples, says, "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath

not flesh and bones as ye see me have." And one especially sceptical disciple Jesus asked to "reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side." We are also told that Jesus ate some broiled fish and some honeycomb with his disciples.

On the other hand the last Gospel tells us that Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not." Another makes him pass through closed doors. And we read that he "vanished" out of sight; presumably, however, taking his body with him.

Such a picture of the body, the "flesh and bones," of Jesus, feels to be obviously incapable of any natural contemplation. The "eye of faith" is alone equal to such a representation. To that eye, whatever be the religious system connected with it, and looked upon thereby, there are, as we know but too well, no known limits of vision capacity.

Our author here ventures upon a slight description of this angel, upon which he cannot be honestly congratulated. The angel was sat upon the stone he had rolled away, and "his countenance was like lightning," says our author. As a confession of helplessness to describe a countenance this phrase is not without a force of its own; but that is the only descriptive power it possesses. We may well hope this angel's countenance was much better and pleasanter than the simile here used would lead us to think.

His raiment, adds our author, was white as snow, a simile no fault can be found with; though we might, especially on a certain theory of the composition of these Gospels, not unreasonably have expected something a little more striking and original.

Whether angels habitually wear raiment or assume it on visiting our planet only is not known. Our conceptions of angels are in the main gathered from the ideas of the great painters, from which source many other current Gospel conceptions are also derived; ideas which often will not bear either natural or Gospel examination. The wings of angels in the great pictures are constructed on the ordinary plan we find in winged and feathered animals around us, whilst the remainder of those beings is represented in a way quite as incongruous and defiant as that in which the old mythological combinations were portrayed by the ancient painters and sculptors of other faiths.

When we remember what the countenance of this angel resembled,

⁴ And for fear of him we are not surprised to learn that the guard

the keepers did shake,
and became as dead
men.

which had been told off the preceding morning to watch this sepulchre "did shake, and became as dead men." The latter part of that phrase leaves room for some latitude of interpretation. We are, however, obliged either to take it in a very stringent sense or to conclude that the guards on recovering from the shock took flight. For they are obviously either absent or unconscious in what follows. Not only are the women permitted to enter the sepulchre, but Peter and John on their arrival were also allowed to do so; and in the various conversations at the sepulchre no reference to these guards is made, their absence or their impotent condition being thus evident. It may be observed that the presence and stationing of a guard at Jesus' sepulchre are found in this Gospel only.

The sight of this angel had happily, and as might have been anticipated, not the same disastrous effect upon these two women it had had upon the Roman guard; though it filled even them with trembling and fear. But they were re-assured by the angel's entering into conversation with them, which there is much reason to fear he had not done with the guards.

Addressing the women, the angel bade them not to fear. An angel's voice, even though speaking the unusual and not very attractive language of these women, must, we should suppose, be very delightful to listen to. Proceeding, the angel agreeably accommodated himself to these women by speaking of the great king of heaven, the great Alpha and Omega he had worshipped in heaven so long, if not for ever, by his earthly name of Jesus. "I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified," said the angel; "he is not here, for he is risen as he said." And in corroboration of his statement the angel invited the women to "come and see the place where the Lord lay."

After this the angel charged the two women to go quickly and tell the news to the disciples, adding that Jesus was going before them into Galilee where they would see him. But we shall soon see that this great pleasure was to be experienced long before their return to Galilee; though we cannot doubt that that promised meeting in Galilee was also afterwards redeemed both to these women and to the disciples.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead: and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

Having, no doubt, beheld the vacant sepulchre as requested, the two women took their departure and "did run to bring his disciples word"; a phrase which leads us to think the disciples must have been gathered together and somewhere in close proximity to this Golgotha garden.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

"His disciples." Somehow, Reader, there is an unpleasant, strained feeling in rejoining and thinking of these disciples. Their conduct on the arrest of their leader had been a disgrace to human nature; not to name the extra elevation of that nature which some years' constant companionship with our Creator would certainly have justly led us to look for in these men. When we think of the heroism so often shown by men who have shared the fortune and death of their leader in even many a manifestly forlorn cause, the pusillanimous behaviour of these eleven saints excites our strongest aversion. Their whereabouts after deserting Jesus up to the time now arrived at we can only conjecture; all we know is that they were not where they ought to have been. And to us this continued absence is much worse than even their flight. It is possible they may have spent the interval since we heard of them last in healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead; but we should have liked even better than that to have read of their being present when the crowd was demanding the release of Barabbas and the blood of their master.

Before proceeding with the consideration of the further stages of the narrative, we may just glance at the versions of events up to this point found in the other Gospels.

The next Gospel tells us that the three women there named found on arrival at the sepulchre that the stone was rolled away therefrom already; and that the three had been discussing amongst themselves on the way thither how that obstacle was to be removed. They then entered the sepulchre, where they found a "young man" sitting on one side of it who was clad in a long white garment. This young man addressed the women in somewhat similar terms to those used by the angel in this account; the name of Peter being specially mentioned in addition to that of the disciples generally. After this the three women fled from the sepulchre, "neither said they anything to any man."

The third Gospel tells us that the women thus visiting the sepulchre consisted of "Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary

the mother of James, and other women that were with them," the number of these women being thus five at least. We read that they entered the sepulchre, and, not finding the body of Jesus, were much "perplexed thereabout." While thus concerned and troubled, "behold two men stood by them in shining garments." The women were apparently addressed by both these men. Unlike the angel in our author, who asked the women to "come and see the place where the Lord lay," these two men asked, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" a query that does not seem to have much point in it in any sense, and does not seem very appropriate in a sepulchre where no one but Jesus had ever been laid. The remainder of the words spoken by these "two men" were in substance similar to those spoken by the angel in our Gospel. On returning from the sepulchre these women "told all these things unto the eleven and to all the rest."

In the last Gospel Mary Magdalene alone is named. She comes to the sepulchre, and, on finding the stone rolled away, ran and told Peter and John that Jesus had been taken away; whereupon Peter and John ran to the sepulchre. Peter entered the sepulchre; found the linen clothes lying there, and the napkin that had wrapped the head of Jesus folded in a place by itself. John then also entered, and "he saw and believed." "For as yet they knew not the scriptures, that he must rise again from the dead"; from which it appears that not only our author, but also the angels, were mistaken on this point. After this the two disciples went back to their "own home," by which some friend's house in Jerusalem must apparently be meant.

But Mary Magdalene remained at the sepulchre weeping—on what account is not discoverable if, as stated in another account, she had been apprised by Jesus of his coming resurrection, and that she would see him thereafter in Galilee. Whilst thus weeping, Mary stooped and looked into the sepulchre, and saw two angels sitting there, who asked, "Woman, why weepest thou?" "Because," she replied, "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." On turning round, she found Jesus standing beside her, who asked her the same question the two angels had asked her. Not recognizing Jesus, she supposed him to be the gardener, but discovered the truth on Jesus saying to her, "Mary."

Whether the resurrection of Jesus was a fact or a fiction remains,

from the nature of the case, an undeterminable problem. But one thing is quite certain. If that resurrection was a fact, more unsatisfactory accounts of it than those we possess could not easily be conceived.

On the theory that four such accounts of the resurrection of Jesus were written by celestial inspiration—if such a supposition be enter-tainable—it is not possible to help the conviction that to make Christian faith arduous and difficult must have been intended.

Coming back to our author's version, we find that as the two Marys were on their way to tell the disciples, Jesus "met them," and said to them, "All hail." Most "harmonists" consider this a second meeting following that to Mary alone, in which she was forbidden to touch her Lord. Here the two held Jesus by the feet and worshipped him. It may, however, be remarked that the schemes for reconciling the different versions of the resurrection are as various and as irreconcilable as those versions themselves. What a pity it is such schemes should be needed!

Jesus added that the women were to tell his brethren they were to go into Galilee, where he would meet them. It is impossible to certainly make out when this meeting in Galilee took place. It seems referred to a few verses later on, and the last Gospel concludes with the description of such a meeting with seven of the disciples at the lake of Tiberias. On the other hand, the third Gospel tells us that Jesus, on appearing to his disciples, commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem; that he led them to Bethany, from which village he ascended to heaven; and the Gospel ends by saying how the disciples were continually in the temple praising God.

The reunion with the body of a liberated soul must have been a most singular feeling; and—apart from the abnormal case of Jesus—it is to be regretted we do not possess an account of this experience by some of the many others who had enjoyed or endured it. Even with us ordinary mortals, it must be a curious feeling, if we are permitted it, to look back on leaving our body at death and witness that well-known—often, in some portions, too well known—tabernacle of the flesh be handled and disposed of by others. But to re-enter that familiar figure, to feel the old heart and lungs at

9 ¶ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

work again, and possibly also to feel again some one or other of the ills to which flesh is heir, must be a sensation indeed.

It seems that the first appearance of Jesus after his resurrection was, either with others or alone, to Mary Magdalene. "He appeared first to Mary Magdalene," is the express statement of one Gospel; and the description of that apparently favoured sole manifestation to her is described at length in another. Who can help feeling how much pleasanter it would have been to read that the first appearance of Jesus had been to his mother?

But of the numerous re-appearances of Jesus after his resurrection not one is to her; she is not even mentioned as being present at any one of them; a fact which we think all readers of these Gospels will find to be particularly striking and painful.

Leaving for a time the conclusion of the resurrection history, our author in the singular parenthesis found in this and the four following verses, undertakes to explain how the Jews accounted for the disappearance of Jesus from his tomb. For as Jesus did not, unfortunately, show himself in public or to any non-believers, they were clearly not called upon to account for his re-appearance.

Some of the watch, who, we may remember, had been as dead men, and who thus had well nigh experienced a resurrection of their own, made their way back into the city, and gave the chief priests an account of what had happened.

On receipt of these tidings these chief priests in their usual manner got together an assembly of elders, where the problem how to deal with the news received from the guards of Jesus' tomb was discussed. What with Jesus' own description of them, and what with the various proceedings attributed to them in these Gospels, we have become quite accustomed to the chief priests of Jehovah and to the scribes and elders who supported them in dispensing what, until

the past three years had been the only divine truth and true religion the world had possessed; and from the entire absence of which we think few readers will differ from us in thinking that the world would not have greatly suffered.

But in what our author now ascribes to them, these official re-

11 ¶ Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

presentatives of Jehovah, who according to the description of them by Jehovah's son were whited sepulchres and children of a certain well-known personage, excel themselves even. They do not doubt the information given by these watchmen; do not suspect them of having been bribed, or of having neglected their duty, and then coming and tendering a concocted story in excuse thereof. They accept the astounding tidings conveyed to them; and then, Reader, as the conclusion of this assembled council, decide to offer large money to these soldiers to spread abroad the false statement that the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body of their master whilst they—the guards—had slept; the penalty of sleeping whilst on duty, of which these soldiers were thus to convict themselves, being death.

We are thus called upon to believe that these Jewish priests and elders in assembled council were waited upon by the watchers of Jesus' sepulchre; by men who had just felt the earthquake; who had just seen a real angel come down and roll away the stone and tear away the seal these priests had put upon it; men whom that angel's presence had just terrified until they became "as dead men." And then we are asked to believe that at this interview this assembled council proceeded to bribe, and these witnesses proceeded to accept a bribe to hush the matter up; or rather, for these guards to circulate a false report of their own dereliction of duty, the punishment of which was death.

Such a call is addressed to us in vain. To such receptive capacity as we possess a contradiction in terms might as well be offered.

Further, this sapient council undertook not only the task of smothering what they are represented as being perfectly aware was divine truth, but also undertook another task not much less difficult—to persuade the governor to wink at the confessed flouting of their duty by these Roman soldiers.

"So they took the money." Men who had just been "as dead men" from the quaking of the earth and the presence of an angel from heaven whose countenance was like lightning, took the money, did as they were taught, and remained for ever silent of the mighty events they had beheld.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Could men possibly contain and bear such a secret? Could all the gold in Judea purchase such a silence? For ourselves, Reader, we can only answer—This will not do. As well bid us believe that twice two then made five.

Whether Jesus rose from the dead or not, must be left to the judgment and the belief or disbelief of each Gospel reader; but the sorry explanation of the conduct of those who witnessed the miraculous opening of his sepulchre, but would not own it, here proffered to us, deserves the derision of believers in that resurrection quite as much as that of non-believers in it.

The stationing of watchmen at the tomb of Jesus is known to our author only; no mention of this difficulty, and therefore no account of how it was overcome, being found in the other Gospels. And if, as one Gospel states, the women came not, as here stated, to "see" the sepulchre, but to enter it, and anoint the body of Jesus, it is clear they were ignorant and unexpectant of any guard thereat.

The centurion and his comrades who witnessed and took charge of the crucifixion of Jesus, and beheld the prodigies that accompanied that event, were, we are told, convinced that they had been crucifying the Son of God. The other troop of Roman soldiers who guarded the tomb where the crucified body of Jesus had been placed were even more vividly and forcibly impressed with the mighty character of the emerged occupant of that tomb. Alas! Reader, we seek in vain for a vestige of the testimony of any of these men, testimony which would have been more effectual and weighty than that of many disciples and prior adherents.

Learned men have quarrelled at great length over the real import of the phrase "until this day," which our author has used once before. Like the "In those days" with which his real narrative begins, it certainly suggests to his readers a long interval; both phrases have an unmistakably distant flavour about them. The long adjournment of the composition of his Gospel by Matthew thus pointed to is not very susceptible of any natural explanation; but is pleasing as showing that our author was spared to live out his days like his historian-colleague.

16 ¶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

The women, as we have seen, were bidden by Jesus to tell the disciples to go into Galilee, where they would see him. This, as we here read, the eleven complied with and "went away into Galilee."

We may remember that on the way from the supper-room to the place where Jesus was arrested he had told the disciples, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." And it appears that either then or by means of these women a definite mountain in that country had been appointed for this re-union.

At this point of the resurrection history a reference to the narratives of the other Gospels shows us the truly arduous task of the Gospel-harmonist; a task which only the poorer type of that profession allege themselves equal to; a task which is even further enhanced by the book of the Acts, which tells us that Jesus was seen of the apostles after his resurrection forty days, "and being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem."

Why, seeing how these disciples had met Jesus in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood more than once immediately after his resurrection, as stated in the other Gospels, they should make an excursion to meet Jesus in Galilee is not perceptible; and even to Gospel-harmonists it is very clearly not given to know some of the mysteries of these Gospels.

How "he goeth before you into Galilee" was the tidings bidden by the angels to be conveyed to "his disciples and to Peter" by these women, this and the next Gospel show us. How, "when they had heard that he was alive and had been seen of her"—Mary Magdalene, who reported the news—"they believed not"; and how, even when "two of them," to whom Jesus appeared as they walked into the country, went and told the fact to the others, "neither believed they them," are duly recorded by the next Gospel. And how Jesus appeared "to the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart," that Gospel also tells us. Indeed, the last chapter of that Gospel itself furnishes to the harmonist a most formidable difficulty; which the well-known grave suspicion that the highly curious latter half of it is a "supplement" can alone account for and explain.

How, on receipt of the sepulchre news from the many women there named as conveying it to the apostles, "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not," the third Gospel assures us. But we also learn from that account that Jesus had appeared to Peter on the day of the resurrection; and how John had been to the sepulchre, and how he "saw and believed," does he not himself tell us? We also learn from the third Gospel how Jesus appeared in the midst of the disciples the very evening of the resurrection day and bade them tarry in the city of Jerusalem. At this meeting "he opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures"; a much-needed process; a process we much fear, Reader, necessary to that end with any of us. How

effectual this opening has been with our author his masterly applications of prophecy show us. How lamentably imperfect, if not altogether absent, such opening has been with modern divines and theologians their contradictory works and the many divisions they have made in the household of faith sorrowfully attest.

Finally, how the third Gospel knows nothing of any post-resurrection proceedings in Galilee, and how in a perplexingly uninterrupted continuation of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the evening of the resurrection day we read that Jesus led them to Bethany and ascended therefrom to heaven, and how the disciples were continually in the temple praising God, may be seen by any reader of that Gospel.

Eight days after the resurrection the disciples were still in Jerusalem, as we learn from the fourth Gospel. For it seems that at the resurrection-evening meeting Thomas was not present, and though assured by his ten fellow-apostles that Jesus had been with them, he was entirely sceptical. "I will not believe," said Thomas, "unless I see in his hands the print of the nails," and other proofs more expressive than elegant he goes on to name. At the second meeting of the disciples with Jesus eight days afterwards Thomas is afforded the proof his scepticism had demanded, and is fully satisfied.

In what way all this is consonant with the command of Jesus to the women to bid the disciples go into Galilee, when, as we see, he himself met with them in Jerusalem several times during the next eight days, we do not know. It is the custom of many apologists, who candidly own the great difficulties of these resurrection histories, to say as a final resource that if we only possessed fuller information all these varying fragmentary items would blend and be in full unison. We cannot accept the contention. But even if we could, does it seem fair, Reader, or is it creditable to the theory of divine inspiration, that belief in the most vital article of faith should have been thus rendered so arduous and so harassing, not to say impossible? Surely there are sufficient other things in these Gospels to amply test and try our faith without straining and imperilling it upon this vital point.

When the disciples reached the appointed mountain in Galilee, and saw Jesus, they worshipped him; "but," we are told, "some doubted." How many of these eleven, and also which of them, doubted, is left unstated. It may be presumed that our

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

author was not one of them.

The utter scepticism of these apostles becomes positively wearisome. How they believed not the resurrection of their master—how they deemed such accounts as they obtained of it idle tales—we have seen. Nor does the upbraiding for their unbelief and hardness of heart given to them by Jesus at the meeting on the evening of the resurrection day seem to have had much effect upon them. Even the unpleasant handlings afforded to them, and again to Thomas a week afterwards, seem to have left them still sceptical; and we now read that on rejoining their risen master in Galilee “some doubted.”

It is the habit of many commentators to praise such passages as this on the score of the candour and truthfulness they evince. We do not quite understand how it is possible to praise divine inspiration for such a virtue as being candid. Regarded as a human writer merely, and especially as one of the eleven in question, our author deserves much praise for recording an admission of this kind. And yet he would have deserved greater praise still if he had been a little more candid and a little less vague.

What was it some of these apostles doubted? Was it the identity of Jesus? Was it the reality of his death? Our author well knew the circumstances he here so abruptly alludes to, and it is to be regretted he did not disclose them. He does not even tell us whether these doubts were removed or remained. The assurances of apologists that they were removed are a very unsatisfactory substitute.

The emphasis and the reiteration of the thorough scepticism of these apostles—who had, as we have ourselves seen, been apprised by Jesus again and again, as clearly as words could do so, that he would rise again on the third day—regarding their master’s resurrection, are much overdone; and unmistakably suggest to us that the idea that the overcoming of such deep-rooted doubt would seem proof positive of the truth of that resurrection was the animating motive of the representations given in these narratives.

A mistaken calculation, in our judgment, Reader. These narratives lose vastly more by such scepticism of the apostles than they gain by the supposed overcoming thereof. To show how these apostolic miracle-workers, self-raisers of the dead, and companions of Jesus believed the accounts of his own resurrection “idle tales,” and how they had their unbelief overcome, was evidently thought by these Gospel writers to be extremely effective. The truth is, it

is extremely disastrous. When the very last we read of these eleven apostles is that "some doubted," need we wonder that so many readers ever since have doubted also?

And here we may just state that we have written these observations on these closing verses, as we have written all our others, on the provisional assumption that this Gospel history we have dwelt upon so long is—not what itself purports to be, for it is absolutely anonymous, but—what it is commonly called, the Gospel "according to Matthew." This allegation we have from the outset provisionally accepted and held throughout. Nor, did we believe such an allegation to be true, should we alter a single remark upon this Gospel which we have made.

But we have no such belief. We are quite aware our opinion upon such a point has no value except what the prolonged dwelling upon and thinking out of a narrative may be reasonably supposed to give to the opinion of any student. But at the end of this work we may, we think, be permitted to place such opinion on record; and to repeat what we have already said, that if the apostle Matthew wrote this Gospel, he failed in his first duty to his readers by not stating the fact.

In completion of this resurrection history, the last chapter of the last Gospel tells us that Jesus also appeared to seven of the apostles at the sea of Tiberias, and wrought a post-resurrection miracle. These seven apostles had been out fishing all night, and had "caught nothing." When the morning was come Jesus stood on the shore; but the apostles did not recognize that the person so standing was Jesus. Jesus bade them cast their net on the right side of their ship, with the result that 153 great fishes were at once secured. Whether we owe the knowledge of this interesting number, 153, to the fact that one of these apostles had counted these fish, or to supernatural imparting, we do not know.

On discovering that the figure on shore was Jesus—a discovery due to the penetration of the writer of that fourth Gospel—Peter, who had been naked, girt himself and swam ashore; thus showing that the great alarm he had of sinking in this same lake on a certain other occasion was, as we then suggested, somewhat far fetched. The other six apostles came to shore in a little ship.

On landing, these apostles found a pleasant little surprise prepared for them; a fire of coals, with some fish cooking thereon, and bread made ready for them. "Come and dine," said Jesus to them.

“When they had dined,” a conversation ensued which was begun by Jesus asking Peter the invidious looking question, “Simon, lovest thou me more than these?” and which was continued at some length in the true Johannine manner.

Any attempt to fix the chronological order of Jesus’ re-appearances is obviously vain. It is the usual hypothesis of harmonists that these apostles returned from this neighbourhood of lake Tiberias to Jerusalem, and witnessed the final ascension from Bethany; in flagrant defiance, however, of the Gospel that records that ascension.

As there were obviously considerable intervals between the various re-appearances of Jesus, we can scarcely suppose that he again dwelt on our planet. It seems natural to think that he ascended to heaven and descended to earth on each occasion.

The chief difficulty we experience, in following these occurrences, is the resumption of his body by Jesus. We have seen how Jesus resumed his actual “flesh and bones” in the most literal way, and how he even partook of food. Whether we ought now to think of Jesus as still retaining his human body or as being now pure spirit free from materialistic surroundings, we are unable to gather. That Jesus still bears about with him the body he animated whilst on earth is to us a very baffling conception. It feels a very formidable addition to the Trinity of a highly impracticable kind.

With this verse, Reader, we finally part from these apostles. Grieved, sincerely grieved, we are that we cannot carry away a better estimate of these men than the one left by them upon our mind. Every reader likes to close a history with as kindly a feeling to and as good an estimate of the personages thereof as is possible. But we have no choice but to own that we close this Gospel history with a most unpleasant memory of these twelve companions of Jesus.

Of men who quarrelled at the last supper; who fell asleep again and again in the garden; who took to flight when their master was arrested; who kept away whilst he was tried; and who scouted the news of his resurrection, it is not possible for even Christians to profess any great personal esteem. Hence it is common to find in Christian literature the view expressed that the grandeur of their leader was made more manifest in the weakness of these disciples; that human weakness illustrated the divine strength. From such

a view, not a very elevating one in any of its senses, we utterly dissent; like much other supposed piety it is not honouring, and its effect is really the opposite of the one imagined.

Of the dead apostle and the grounds of his selection nothing further need here be said. In the eleven we take leave of in this verse, apart from their backslidings altogether, it is impossible to discern any natural or positive qualities which led to their being chosen. They were ignorant, superstitious, all of one particular class, further narrowed by much blood-relationship; and we seek in vain for any striking or admirable quality in any one of them. Jesus afterwards selected, so at least we are told, from amongst those bitter enemies, the Pharisees, another apostle of a very different type. And small as is our admiration for the apostle of the Gentiles, there is, at any rate, no difficulty in perceiving some grounds of his selection. But the twelve apostles Jesus personally surrounded himself with were most meagre individuals in every sense; and the fact that they, or, at any rate, eleven of them, are now sat on the eleven thrones in heaven promised to them, does not alter our estimate of them in the very least.

In the interview with his apostles on this Galilean mountain

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Jesus declared, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." It is not clear what we ought to understand by this statement. As Creator of heaven and earth it seems that

Jesus must always have possessed this power; and yet the phrase seems to imply the bestowal and receipt of power from this time onward.

From a Christian standpoint the history of our earth previous to this date is not very creditable to the possession by Jesus of all power therein. But is the subsequent history of our earth any more so? The personage known as the Prince of this world seems to have been but very partially dispossessed. Even the most ardent believer in the Prophet of Nazareth must admit that the affairs of our planet seem to have remained under a very mixed jurisdiction, and for a long time were very considerably worse than they had been previous to this time. For the millennium that followed this declaration of Jesus—including a very noteable event in Arabia—was the most dismal period in the history of our species. And, when after that long period of faith and gloom, light began to

dawn and spread over our race, that light did not come from Judea or from anything ever said or done in that portion of our earth's surface.

Having announced to them his possession of all power in heaven and in earth, Jesus went on to bid these disciples to go and "teach all nations." The propagation and fate of the true religion on our planet was thus left to the self-same outward methods that all other religions have also used—the methods of human agency. All creeds profess to have the approval and the co-operation of heaven; but in spite of these lofty claims to that mighty celestial aid, they are all obviously and painfully dependent for their maintenance and their propagation upon human agency. The choice of such humble, slow, and lamentably ineffective means for achieving an end he has in view and is so solicitous to accomplish, on the part of an omnipotent being, is a mystery to the human understanding, as is more fully and conclusively shown in the ill-advised suggestions and conjectures offered to us on the subject by the more ambitious but indiscreet class of theologians and apologists. The usual Christian view of this subject is that it is inscrutable. If by inscrutable be meant simply unintelligible, we quite concur in such a view of the use of tedious means by omnipotence; but in some of the shades of meaning given to the word inscrutable we are entirely unable to agree in the application thereto of that word, and especially do we here demur to the familiar connotation of the word inscrutable which implies unsearchable wisdom, as in the hands of theologians as applied to the ways of providence it is made to do.

Jesus himself, as we know, was not sent but unto to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He did not honour a Gentile nation with a personal visit, for the visit to Egypt had no connection with any missionary purpose, its object being solely to get away from Bethlehem for a time.

The dispensing of the children's bread to the—we will say heathen—was thus left to the instrumentality of these eleven apostles; an instrumentality which does not make us feel inordinately flattered.

These disciples were not only to teach the peoples they went to, but were also to baptize them. In this ceremony we own, Reader, to having no faith whatever. Some three years previous to this,

19 ¶ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

the Baptist had baptized Jerusalem and all Judea with confessing of sins. To how little purpose all this baptizing had been, not only this Gospel record, but also the subsequent history of that doomed city, and land, and people, fully shows us. And we are sorry to be compelled to add that the inefficacy of this process is now only too manifest in the cases of most baptized people personally known to ourselves. How many of us who underwent this ceremony on our appearance in the world are obliged to own that it has not had the effect it was intended to have! Whether the Christians who adjourn the process of baptism to a later period in life are able to trace its efficacious results more clearly we cannot say.

It is natural to suppose that in their constant companionship with our Creator for a number of years these

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

eleven must have heard much that is not disclosed to us in these Gospels; though in their recorded teachings and in the letters

written by three of these disciples there is no additional information of any material kind made known to us. Christians will probably say that in the teachings of Jesus himself recorded in these Gospels there is amply sufficient for us, and that no augmentation was needed or desirable; a view with which, though on different grounds, we in the main entirely concur.

Unhappily, Reader, the practical difficulty on this subject is, and has always been, to determine what the "all things whatsoever I have commanded you" do teach. What is Christianity? What does it teach? What does it require of men? Controversial questions indeed. Alas! no man and no body of men have ever given or ever can give clear answers to these questions. No answers have ever been or can be given that would not be traversed and challenged even by large bodies of Christians themselves. Ever since Christianity made its appearance in the world down to this very day, there have been and are being taught in its name not incongruities only but also antagonisms of the most fundamental kind. Nor need we wonder at this; for as these Gospels, if correct, abundantly show us, they were also taught by Jesus himself.

A very characteristic sentence brings this Gospel to a close. "With you alway, even unto the end of the world." The "with you" and the "end of the world" in this phrase need much mental adjusting in order to cohere. Some conjectural addition to the

former words, or some figurative understanding of the latter is necessary to that end. The first of these courses is usually adopted and the successors of these apostles taken as implied in the words "with you." It is unnecessary to discuss this supposition when we remember that Jesus had already promised to be with any "two or three" gathered together in his name.

The tracing of divine guidance in human history, both before and since the time of Jesus, is not a cheering study. It is only during the last four centuries, since the freedom of the human mind has been asserted and obtained, and since man, gradually discarding supposed celestial guidances, which led him only into ignorance and gloom, began to trust to and freely exert his own faculties, his own research, and his own wisdom, that the history of humanity has been so encouraging.

Exhilarating indeed is this record of what man has done for himself. How by the exertion of his own powers, his own searchings, and his own experiments he has come to know so much of that Nature, and that Universe which all the celestialisms had not only obscured from him, but had in their petty way ignominiously distorted to him; and how by these same powers of his own, man has made practical discoveries and devised marvellous inventions which have alleviated, enlarged, and in some respects almost transformed the conditions of human existence, is an ennobling narrative indeed.

Not less glorious is the record of what human wisdom, and that virtue which, with a just pride we term humanity, have in these latter centuries accomplished for us in other ways. How they have removed from amongst us one scourge after another, and liberated us from one burden after another on the human mind and the human heart—burdens not seldom, nay often, placed there by those very religions which profess to befriend us; and how from one generation to another by the efforts of noble thinkers better ideals are held up to us, which, though slowly, are yet ever surely more and more realized—all these things are gladdening and elevating beyond measure.

When from this history we turn to the history of the religions barrenness of all the achievements and blessings we have just dwelt upon, and not seldom even shameful resistance to them confront us, whilst not barrenness, but, alas! fertility in the production of strifes and alienations, external and internal, presents itself;

and last, but not least, all the forms of good which are adopted and enjoined by the various religions we see avowedly inculcated and pursued not for their own sake, or for man's sake, but for ulterior, selfish, and most mercenary objects and purposes.

And if, leaving other things, we reflect upon the history of that household of Christian faith where the divine guidance of Jesus would seem to be most naturally and clearly sought for and found, a very sorrowful record and a very painful spectacle are brought to memory and to sight. What a contemplation of the internal history of the Christian faith may be to those who hold it we do not know. To outsiders anything more lamentable and humbling could not be pictured. If the history and the spectacle presented to us by that household of faith be illustrative of celestial wisdom and profundity, we may well shun that divine exemplar, and continue to cling to those humble but worthy and honest human processes which have proved so reliable and so fruitful in blessed results.

Our task, Reader, is now ended. How it has been performed it is not for us to judge. We are very conscious of many faults and many shortcomings in our work, and there are in it doubtless also many of which we are not conscious. Where what we have written is wrong and mistaken, as we cannot doubt it often may be, it will be for others to show our errors, and in that end we earnestly wish them complete success.

But amid the many defects and failings of this book, of which we are very cognizant, we are also conscious and have a clear and firm feeling that we have been faithful to its prime purpose of recording the plain, candid, and honest thoughts this Gospel matter has produced in us.

To us, also, it has ever felt that such a purpose, with us or with anyone, and with this or with any subject, is a worthy and a righteous one, and one that is nowhere so much needed as with a religion; for on no other subject the world over does there exist so much nominal, unreal, and insincere acquiescence. Our conviction is also strong that to faithfully speak forth honest thoughts cannot either in religion or in anything else be otherwise in the end than useful and beneficial.

Precious as truth is in all things whatsoever, it is supremely precious in the matter of religion. If there be a true religion, to find it and to embrace it is an object with all men of surpassing concern. On the other hand, religious delusion dwarfs all other

delusions, and to help to free men from it is the greatest service and boon that can be conferred upon mankind.

On any supposition whatever our race in the main are and have ever been the victims of false religions. That appalling fact may of itself well make us ask ourselves, Can there possibly be a true one?

To that momentous inquiry we have here, Reader, made our little contribution. May it in its humble way help to answer that great question truthfully.



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